CASTE IN MODERN INDIA

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CASTE IN MODERN INDIA

AND OTHER ESSAYS

M. N. Srinivas

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To My Brother

M. N. PARTHASARATHY

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CONTENTS

	Introduction	1
1.	Caste in Modern India	15
2.	A Note on Sanskritization and Westernization	42
3.	Varna and Caste	63
4.	Castes: Can They Exist in the India of Tomorrow?	70
5.	The Industrialization and Urbanization of Rural Areas	77
6.	The Indian Road to Equality	87
7.	The Nature of the Problem of Indian Unity	98
8.	The Study of Disputes in an Indian Village	112
9.	Village Studies and Their Significance	120
10.	Social Anthropology and the Study of Rural and Urban Societies	136
11.	Hinduism	148
	Index	161

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Delhi, January, 1962 M. N. Srinivas

INTRODUCTION

The essays included in this volume were written during the years 1952-60. Each one of them was written in response to a specific invitation to contribute to a seminar, symposium or learned publication. In each case there was a deadline, and as everyone knows, meeting the deadline frequently involves a compromise with one's conscience. But it is also true that, in many cases, the essay would not have been written but for the deadline.

The essays are on a wide variety of topics, and I would like to stress the fact that they were written over a period of eight years. My views have naturally undergone a certain amount of change during this time but I have refrained from making any except minor verbal alterations in the essays. An essay has a structural unity and it is not possible to add or delete paragraphs. I find the writing of a new essay less difficult than changing an old one. Apart from this, a few of the essays included in this volume have stimulated a fair amount of discussion and it would not be fair to my critics to alter them substantially.

II

Caste in Modern India : The first essay included in this book "Caste in Modern India", was read as the Presidential Address to the Anthropology and Archaeology Section of the Forty-fourth Session of the Indian Science Congress, which met in Calcutta in January 1957. In it I tried to highlight the part played by caste in the democratic processes of modern India, and in administration and education. I must confess that I was somewhat disturbed by what I felt was an increased activity of caste in certain areas of public life. In this connection I came across certain conflicting attitudes among the elite. On the one hand there seemed to be a touching faith in the efficacy of legislation to cure ancient and deep-seated social 'evils.' On the other hand, there was not only no determined effort on the part of the elite to fight these evils but there was also a tolerance of their practice.[1]

[1] See in this connection Chapter 4.

When "Caste in Modern India" was read at Calcutta it drew from the *Times of India*[2] the comment that I was exaggerating the role of caste in Indian public life and politics. But the General Elections which followed a few weeks later seemed to shock thoughtful people into an awareness of the relation between caste and elections. This relationship was manifest not only in those areas in South India which were regarded as the traditional strongholds of caste but also in certain parts of North India such as Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. The Congress Working Committee, meeting soon after elections, took formal note of the fact that caste considerations had played a large part in influencing voting behaviour. A well-known political leader remarked that whatever the political party to which candidates professed to belong, they really stood from their castes.

The General Elections of 1957 may be said to have awakened the Indian intelligentsia as to the actual considerations which influenced voting. It also led to the widespread condemnation of exploitation of caste-links for election purposes. Condemnation, however, is not the same thing as abstaining from the desire to use it to further the interest of one's own party. Elections to panchayats and municipalities held in subsequent years have shown conclusively that caste considerations are potent.[3] The establishment of Panchayat Raj in Rajasthan and Andhra has given a new fillip to caste.

The hold of caste is also seen in the tenacity with which castes which were once classed as 'backward' cling to that privilege. The *Mysore Backward Classes Committee Report* (1961) published a list of backward castes on the basis of the number of high school students per thousand of a caste's population. (This is done in spite of the fact that statistics regarding caste are not firm, and the unit which is regarded as a caste is often quite arbitrary.) The Lingayats were classified as a 'forward community" in the Report, but they brought such political pressure to bear that the Mysore Cabinet ordered that they be classified as a "backward" community. *The Report of the Administrative Reforms Committee of Kerala* (1958) pointed out, in an admirable way, the risks and drawbacks of treating caste as the basis of backwardness and the attraction of using the economic criterion in determining the backwardness of

[2] The *Times of India*, Editorial, 21st January, 1957.

[3] See L. I. Rudolph's "Urban Life and Populist Radicalism" in the *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. XX, No. 3, May 1961, pp. 283-97.

individuals, but felt that the time was not ripe for its adoption.[4] Only two Indian States, Maharashtra and Gujarat, now use the economic criterion exclusively in determining backwardness.

III

A sociologist would define caste as a hereditary, endogamous, usually localized group, having a traditional association with an occupation, and a particular position in the local hierarchy of castes. Relations between castes are governed, among other things, by the concepts of pollution and purity, and generally, maximum commensality occurs within the caste.

In the above definition it is assumed that a caste group is always easily identifiable and that it does not change its social boundaries. This, however, is not true. A caste is usually segmented into several sub-castes and each sub-caste is endogamous. This segmentation is probably the result of a long historical process in which groups continually fissioned off. As a result of this long process of development there has come into existence several cognate groups, usually found scattered over a limited geographical region (this, however,

[4] "We have considered the question of reservation of posts for backward classes. In this State, 40 per cent of the posts in Government service are reserved for Backward Communities. This is in addition to the reservation of 10 per cent for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Within this 40 per cent there is a 'principle of subrotation' by which a certain percentage is reserved for a community or group of communities.

"The system, as it now exists, has several disadvantages. Firstly, there is a continuous clamour to include more and more communities in the list and the basis for the assessment of their backwardness is not entirely satisfactory. Secondly there are among the 'backward classes' communities which are 'relatively advanced' and those who are truly backward. The latter have a feeling that the benefit of the reservation generally goes to the former. The 'principle of subrotation' has not met this to a satisfactory extent. Thirdly, there is the consideration, that such reservation inevitably brings down the quality and standard of the services. The most important point, however, is that the system creates a psychology amongst all the communities by which caste and communal consciousness is perpetuated.

"On account of these, it has been suggested by some that the criteria for backwardness should be economic rather than those based merely on communities. This suggestion looks attractive. But, apart from the fact that over 80 per cent of our people should be considered to be economically backward, it ignores the historical fact that economic backwardness in our country, has, in most cases, been the concomitant and result of social backwardness.

is increasingly less true of the higher groups), each of which retains a sense of its identity as well as its linkage with other similar groups. Traditionally, it was the smallest group which constituted the unity of endogamy, and the identity of this tiny group stood out sharply against other similar groups. All the members of this group pursued a common occupation or a few common occupations, and this group was the unit of social and ritual life. The members of this group ate food cooked by each other, shared a common culture, and in most cases, were governed by the same caste-panchayat. During the last sixty years or more, however, the linkages between groups have become more and more significant, and the strong walls erected between sub-castes have begun to crumble. The endogamous circle is widening, especially under the impact of the dowry system which is specially characteristic of the high castes. Certain other factors have also been significant in this context : the greater mobility brought about under British rule, the movement to the cities for higher education and employment, urban cosmopolitanism and Westernization. In the case of the lower castes, which were also more rurally oriented than the higher, political factors have been responsible for the weakening of the barriers between sub-castes. Thus, leaders of the non-Brahmin castes in South India came together in order to obtain certain concessions and privileges, and to break the Brahminical dominance. Not only were the internal divisions within each non-Brahmin caste ignored, but all non-Brahmins including Jains, Christians, and Muslims came together on a

"It is exceedingly difficult to suggest a simple solution to this complicated problem. A certain amount of protection and encouragement to the backward classes is necessary for some time to come, so that they may get over the handicaps to which they have been subjected for centuries. The grievances of the economically backward sections of the so-called 'forward classes' are also real. Their complaint is that under the garb of the reservation, richer persons of less merit belonging to the backward communities are able to get better facilities in education and recruitment to services, which are not available to persons of merit in the 'forward classes', who are really poor. The object of these concessions is obviously economic upliftment which, it is hoped, will lead automatically to social upliftment. The concessions should therefore, be given only to those who are really poor in the communities now described as 'backward'. We are, therefore, of the view that the benefit of the reservation for backward classe should be given only to those individuals who fall below a prescribed economic level. We suggest this as a first step towards the recognition of economic back wardness as the index for giving State protection." *Report of the Administrative Reforms Committee*, Government of Kerala, Vol. I, Parts I & II, 1958, pp. 97-98.

single platform. Thus the term Okkaliga properly applies to Kannada-speaking peasant castes in Mysore. There are several Okkaliga castes each of which is normally endogamous, as for instance, Morasu, Hallikar, Halu, Nonaba, and Gangadikara. But for political purposes the Okkaliga includes not only the above groups but also the Kannada-speaking Kunchatiga, the Tulu-speaking Bant and the Telugu-speaking Reddi. Marriages between Morasu and Gangadikara are few and far between, let alone marriages between Okkaliga and Kunchatiga or Bant or Reddi. (Until recently even the Gangadikara Okkaliga was not a single homogeneous *jati*.) But relationships established at the political level are paving the way for the establishment of social relationships. This affects, however, only the 'top' families in each caste. Marriages between elite from different but cognate *jatis* provide a bridge, initially a slender one, which humbler folk are likely to use later.

The point which needs to be emphasized here is that for purposes of sociological analysis a distinction has to be made between caste at the political level and caste at the social and ritual level. The latter is a much smaller unit than the former. The policy which the British adopted of giving a certain amount of power to local self-governing bodies, and preferences and concessions to backward castes provided new opportunities to castes. In order to be able to take advantage of these opportunities, caste groups, as traditionally understood, entered into alliances with each other to form bigger entities.

In the last twenty years or so, there has been a certain amount of weakening of ideas regarding pollution. While this is specially true of the cities and towns, even the villages have experienced a certain amount of liberalization. This process has, however, been accompanied by the greater activity of caste in administration and politics. Adult franchise and Panchayat Raj have provided new opportunities for castes. In the course of exploitation of new opportunities, the caste system has undergone a certain amount of change. Numerically large castes have become important pressure groups in politics at the District and State levels. The politics of Mysore State will not make sense if we do not take into account the rivalry between Okkaligas and Lingayats. Similarly, in Kerala, there is a triangular struggle between Nayars, Izhavans and Syrian Christians. In Andhra Pradesh the chief competing castes are Reddis and Kammas, in Maharashtra, Maratha, Brahmin and Mahar, in Gujarat, Banias, Patidars and Kolis, and in Bihar,

Bhumihar, Kayasth and Rajput. (It would, however, be a gross oversimplification to state that the politics of a State can be explained entirely by reference to caste. Caste is indeed only one element in State politics but a very important element.)

We need not labour the point further : there is indeed a wide gulf between caste as an endogamous and ritual unit, and the caste-like units which are so active in politics and administration in modern India. But between these entities there is not only connection but much communication. Village level leaders cultivate ministers for privileges and for a variety of favours, and the ministers in turn need the help of village leaders during elections. Many if not most ministers at the State level are also leaders of their castes, and through this, of their regions also. The exact process by which various political levels are articulated with each other is, however, a matter for empirical study. At the present time sociologists and political scientists only take such articulation for granted.

It is relevant to mention here that a controversy exists regarding the meaning and significance to be attached to the activity of caste in the field of politics. One view regards this not only as untraditional but also as a symptom of caste disintegration while the other regards it as evidence of caste flexibility. Dr. Leach writes, "Everywhere in India and Ceylon today whole caste groups are tending to emerge as political factions but it is misleading to think of such behaviour as a characteristic of caste as such. If a whole caste group plays the role of a political faction by competing with other such factions for some common economic or political goal it thereby acts in defiance of caste tradition. But such change of role may not be clear either to the actors or to the anthropological observer.

"If a caste group turns itself into a political faction does it then cease to be a caste? Dr. Gough implies that it does (p. 44) and at the end of her essay (pp. 58-9) she cites the formation of a 'caste labour union' as one among many symptoms of caste disintegration, but Dr. Yalman (p.84) cites the formation of a 'caste welfare society' as one among many symptoms of caste resilience to changing social circumstance!

"My own view is that wherever caste groups are seen to be acting as corporations in competition against like groups *of different caste*, then they are acting in defiance of caste principles."[5]

[5] See *Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon and North-West Pakistan*, Ed. E. R. Leach, Cambridge, 1960, pp. 6-7.

I am afraid I am unable to follow Dr. Gough when she says that the taking on of political functions by a caste changes its nature so radically that it ceases to be a caste. Lingayats and Okkaligas are extremely active in the political life of modern Mysore but when selecting a bride or in their diet and inter-dining, they observe the rules of their respective castes. The rules may be less rigid than they were thirty years ago, but they are there. If it is Dr. Gough's opinion that the involvement of a caste in modern democratic and industrial processes will necessarily lead to its extinction, then the areas of contradiction have to be mapped out clearly and the implications of the contradiction worked out.

Again, I cannot agree with Dr. Leach when he says that competition between caste groups is "in defiance of caste principles." It is true that the castewise division of labour facilitates the interdependence of castes and this is strikingly seen in the *jajmani* system. But interdependence is not the whole story. Castes do compete between each other for acquiring political and economic power and high ritual position. Historically there have been rulers from merchant and peasant castes and even from tribes.

IV

Varna and Caste : Every society has a structure of its own but the structure as is seen by the indigenous inhabitants is not always the same as the structure which the sociologist infers from the data which he has painstakingly collected. The way a people perceive their social structure is important because it influences their behaviour. Moreover, when sociologists make studies of segments of their own society, they are likely to be consciously or unconsciously influenced by such perceptions. This has certainly happened with Indian sociologists. They have tried to perceive the complex facts of the caste system in terms of *varna*. This has resulted in a view of the structure which is ridiculously over-simplified. The caste system of even a small region is extraordinarily complex and it does not fit into the *varna*-frame except at one or two points. For instance, the local caste-group claiming to be Kshatriya may be a tribal or near-tribal group or a low caste which acquired political power as recently as a hundred years ago. The local trading caste again might be similar in its culture to one in the 'Shudra' category, and far removed from the Sanskritized Vaishya of the *varna* system.

Finally, castes included in the Shudra category might not only not be servants, but landowners wielding a lot of power over everyone including local Brahmins.

Again the *varna*-frame is too rigid to fit the facts of inter-caste relations today, and it may be assumed that it was always so rigid. According to *varna*, caste appears as an immutable system where the place of each caste is clearly fixed for all time. But if the system as it actually operates is taken into consideration, the position of several castes is far from clear. Mutual rank is ambiguous and therefore arguable. This is due to the fact that the caste system always permitted of a certain amount of mobility. This is why mutual position tends to be vague in the middle regions of the hierarchy and not at either extremity. At one extremity no mobility is possible while at the other it is extremely difficult. *Varna* also conceals the considerable diversity which exists between the caste system of one region and another. Studies of caste at the regional level ought to be accorded high priority, and only after a comparison of different regions can statements be made about caste at the all-India level.

Concentration on *varna* also meant stressing the attributional or ritual factors in mutual caste ranking at the expense of economic and political factors. There is evidence to show that the ritual position of a caste has changed following on the acquisition of economic or political power, whereas, thanks to *varna*, it is tacitly assumed that ritual factors are primary and others secondary.

The idea of *varna* was on the one hand the result of preoccupation with ancient Indian literary material and on the other it led the scholar back to the same material. Only the study of caste in the field led to showing the inadequacy of *varna* to explain the facts on the ground and to the production of new ideas which in turn resulted in better field-work and new insights into historical data.

V

Sanskritization and Westernization : These two social processes which I found to exist in Coorg and Mysore have also been reported from several other parts of India. The subject of Sanskritization especially has attracted the attention of several scholars.

Sanskritization and Westernization are linked processes in modern India and it is not possible to understand one without reference to

the other. This statement is not to be understood to mean that the two are harmonious or complementary, but only that they are concomitant. Sanskritic and Western values are occasionally in conflict with each other, a fact on which I have commented earlier.

Sanskritization is both a part of the process of social mobility as well as the idiom in which mobility expresses itself. When there is Sanskritization mobility may be said to occur within the framework of caste, whereas Westernization implies mobility outside the framework of caste. This should not be, however, taken to mean that highly Westernized individuals are completely free from any attachment to caste. Caste is not always skin deep. It may not at all be visible normally but may rise to the surface when there is a crisis. Several years ago the son of a prominent social reformer in Western India married a Western girl. (The boy's parents belonged to different castes.) The boy, therefore, had no caste. But, still, some prominent members of the boy's father's caste gave him and his bride a big reception. The contradictions inherent in this incident deserve lengthy comment but there is no space for it here. It is enough to note that the boy's mother was nearly thrown out of caste when she married a man belonging to a lower caste while the son was given a reception by his father's castemen on his marriage to a Western girl.

Sanskritization can also occur independently of the acquisition of political and economic power. In such a case, however, it will not help the particular caste to move up. On the contrary, it may result in that caste's becoming unpopular with its neighbours. The leaders of the locally dominant caste may show their resentment by even beating up the members of the parvenu caste. Beating up, however, is no longer easy. Even poor, illiterate and low castes have become conscious of their legal rights.[6] But the existence of legal right does not emancipate them as they are economically dependent upon the dominant caste.

Dominant castes have played an important role in either advancing or retarding Sanskritization. Dr. D. F. Pocock[7] and Dr. A. C. Mayer[8] have mentioned the existence of two models which other

[6] See F. G. Bailey, *Caste and the Economic Frontier*, Manchester, 1957, pp. 220ff.

[7] See D. F. Pocock, "The Movement of Castes", *Man*, Vol. LV, May 1955, pp. 71-2.

[8] See A. C. Mayer, "*Caste and Kinship in Central India*", London, 1960, pp. 44-45, and also "The Dominant Caste in a Region of Central India", *South Western Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. XIV, No. 4, 1958, pp. 6-7.

castes have imitated, viz., the Brahmin and the Kshatriya. The Brahminical model was naturally more favourable to Sanskritization than the Kshatriya model. In some parts of Western U. P. the Rajputs have exercised such a dominant position that the Sanad Brahmins have imitated them, even to the extent of adding the honorific 'Singh' after their names. The Barots of Gujarat have borrowed the Rajput dress, sword and shield from their princely patrons.

But it is wrong to think that there are only two models, or three, if the Vaishya model is included. The style of living of even a dominant peasant caste is liable to be imitated by others living in the area. In villages within the radius of a few miles from Delhi live Brahmins whose style of life resembles that of the locally dominant Jat. Even in villages in South India, Brahmins resident in villages dominated by non-Brahmin peasant castes tend to borrow the speech, style of life and values of the latter. Thus I have known Brahmin women in rural Mysore to rear sheep and goats to be sold eventually to non-Brahmins for slaughter. This is something which the urban Brahmin will never do. The Lingayats whose adherence to vegetarian and non-violent values is at least as strong as that of the Brahmin, also raise sheep for slaughter in villages around Mysore City. The point which I would like to make here is that rural Brahmins, cut off from the urban and monastic centres of Brahminical culture (centres of 'great tradition'), tend to take over local ways of life ('little communities'). This was strikingly brought home to me at the Kundat Bhadrakali festival in Coorg when the young Brahmin priest of the Bhadrakali temple folded his hands before the Coorg oracle of the deity and requested the latter to forgive the faults of the villagers and depart. The priest looked scared of the oracle whose face was streaming with blood from injuries inflicted upon himself while being "possessed" by the deity. It could be said with justice that away from the centres of the Great Tradition the Brahminical way of life tended to approximate to the way of life of the dominant caste in the little community.

But the process is not as simple as that, however. In rural India, while the Brahminical mode of life has undergone some modification in the direction of that of the locally dominant caste, the culture of the latter is undergoing a change in the direction of Sanskritization. While the influence of the locally dominant caste may spread

over a few villages or a *tehsil* or district or State, the process of Sanskritization has acquired prestige all over the country during the last hundred years or more. Traditionally, political capitals, colleges and monasteries were the creative centres of Sanskritization. Brahmins were able to be agents of Sanskritization in rural areas even when they were cut off from regular contact with the centres because Brahminical life was dominated by ritual. From the moment he got up and till he lay down to sleep at night, a Brahmin's behaviour was regulated by ritual considerations. This style of life was synonymous with right living. It was the only way to earn spiritual merit which in turn would lead to the lessening of the number of lives or incarnations of the individual soul till it attained salvation. Brahmins everywhere in India adhered to a ritualistic mode of life, though there was some difference between the priests and the laity in this respect. The Brahminical mode of life did command a certain amount of prestige even in areas where non-Brahmin castes enjoyed a monopoly of secular power. That is why the latter were pulled towards Sanskritization even while the Brahmins were influenced by the style of life of the secularly dominant caste.

VI

Village Studies and Their Significance : This essay was written with a view to highlight the fact that the agricultural practices of the Indian peasant can only be understood in the context of his technology, level of knowledge, legal and social institutions, religion and way of life. His agriculture constitutes a body of skilled knowledge which is transmitted from one genenation to another. It has enabled him to survive for several centuries in a harsh if not hostile environment, and a corollary of this survival is a certain amount of faith in his traditional techinques, and a certain amount of scepticism towards innovation. The peasant's technical system is interwoven with his social and religious systems, and they together form a closely-meshed entity. The introduction of any single tool or institution will have repercussions not only in the field of techniques but also in the social and religious fields. The peasant's traditional culture is a highly integrated one, and the removal or substitution of even a single item will be followed by changes in other spheres. Administrators who try to change the agricultural or sanitary or

other practices of peasants have to grasp this fact firmly. Resistence to a new tool may come even when its efficiency has been seen by the peasants, because it may disturb the traditionally sanctioned division of labour between the sexes.

It is necessary to stress the fact that the peasant is intelligent but his intelligence functions like that of most people in culturally-approved channels. The peasant's difficulties arise principally from the fact that the culture which served him for several hundred years has been rendered at least partially out of date by new knowledge, new technology and new political forms, and by population growth. Changing this culture to suit the new situation is beyond his intellectual, material and moral resources. This gigantic task has to be achieved by the country as a whole and the Government of India has a special responsibility in this connection.

VII

The Nature of the Problem of Indian Unity : The concept of the unity of India finds expression in Hinduism from a very early period but it is obvious that in a multi-religious country this is not enough. In fact, any symbol or idea that binds together the members of a particular religion divides them at the same time from the members of other religions.

It was only during British rule that India became a single political entity. The technological developments of the last one hundred and fifty years or more made it possible to create an administrative and communications network extending over the whole of India. But this network did not stretch equally effectively over all areas : in certain border regions and in NEFA. administration was minimal. Even villages lying fifteen or twenty miles from a city or town were left to themselves in day-to-day matters and frequently, serious crimes were concealed by villagers from the police. India under the British also included nearly six hundred princely states which enjoyed varying degrees of autonomy. The point that I wish to make here is that the kind of administrative network which stretched across India and the existence of numerous princedoms resulted in giving India only a loose kind of political unity.

It was during British rule that educated Indians began to be influenced by the growing nationalism of European countries. The presence of the British as rulers served to unite Western-educated

Indians who felt that they should govern themselves and not be governed by aliens. This gradually grew to be a powerful movement embracing people from different parts of the country, speaking different languages, professing different religions and belonging to different castes. But from the beginning there were leaders who refused to identify themselves with the national movement as a whole and who spoke only for particular sections of the population or particular areas. The creation of Pakistan was the result of the existence of a strong separatist tendency. Separatist tendencies continue to exist and can be predicted to continue for many years to come. The fact has to be faced that as far as the bulk of the people in the country are concerned India is a new concept and will take some time to become real. The usual social space of the poorer people in the rural areas even today does not extend beyond fifteen-twenty miles from their home. (In the year 1948, in a village twenty two miles by bus from Mysore City, an intelligent Muslim had not heard of either Jinnah or Nehru but only of Gandhi.) India, it is obvious, will not be built in a day.

It is essential to realize in this connection that national self-consciousness does not come in a vacuum. It comes all along the structural points. Religion, sect, caste, language, region, town and village, all develop self-consciousness. Many if not most of these loyalties are more immediate than a loyalty to a vast and heterogeneous entity like India. It will take some years before a proper hierarchy of loyalties is established and immediate loyalties not given priority over loyalty to India.

There are some who think that Indians should have only one loyalty and that should be to India. They are impatient of all other loyalties. But this is not realistic. Nowhere in the world, except perhaps Monaco, do people belong only to their state. Thus a U. S. citizen also belongs to the State he lives in, to his church, kin-group, university, town, neighbourhood and club. Such loyalties, apart from the satisfaction they give to individuals, can provide the necessary motive-force for development. Thus, for instance, loyalty to one's region can provide a powerful impetus to regional development. "Regionalism" implies that the people of a region feel that their region has been neglected and that it should be developed. It also means that they no longer consider their collective poverty to be inevitable but as something which can be put an end to by their own effort and governmental aid. As far as the bulk

of the people in our rural areas are concerned, this signifies a revolution in outlook. It also means that they identify themselves with a geographical area which is bigger than a village or *tehsil* and that they recognize a different type of allegiance from caste, sect or religion. Again, in a country with over 75 per cent illiterates, how will the concept of planning reach ordinary folk? Only when they see a road or bridge or tank being built, or an industry located in their village or in a nearby village, will planning become concrete to them. Without such visible evidence, their sentiments will not be touched and their enthusiasm cannot be roused. And popular enthusiasm is indispensable to democratic planning. Once it is realized that "regionalism" can become an important ally of development there will not be any hesitation to take account of regional considerations in planning. A real danger in this approach, however, is that the benefits tend to be spread so thinly that it will make extremely difficult a leap forward in the economy. But then democratic planning is beset with difficulties.

It is obvious that in the allocation of national resources a major part should be set apart for achieving an economic break through. This should form the economic core of the plan. But the rest should be spent in such a way that there is balanced regional development, and that specially backward areas are given priority in development. Due note should be taken of the fact that there are different levels of regions, and that each regional level is relevant in a particular developmental context. Thus the region for purposes of agricultural benefits or water supply or sanitation would be quite different from the region for the location of steel mills. Better seed and fertilizers are necessary in every district while a steel mill cannot be located in every State let alone in every district.

1. CASTE IN MODERN INDIA

It is my aim in this essay to marshal evidence to show that during the last century or more, the institution of caste has found new fields of activity. The manner in which the British transferred political power to the Indians enabled caste to assume political functions. In Independent India, the provision of constitutional safeguards to the backward sections of the population, especially the Scheduled Castes and Tribes, has given a new lease of life to caste. It is hardly necessary to add that this contrasts with the aim of bringing about a casteless society which most political parties, including the Indian National Congress, profess.

The political system of pre-British India was characterized by clear territorial cleavages marking off the territory of one chieftain or raja from the territories of others. Usually, above the chieftain or the raja, there was the viceroy of an emperor or the emperor himself, and below the chief were the headmen of single villages. The boundaries of a chief's or raja's domain were mobile, being subject to expansion or contraction depending upon the military prowess of the chief *vis-a-vis* other chiefs, and also upon the firmness with which the viceroy or emperor exercised his control. However, while the boundaries were mobile over a period of time, at any single moment they constituted effective barriers between people living in different chiefdoms. Such a political system naturally imposed severe limits on the horizontal extension of caste ties. In short, political frontiers determined the effective, if not the maximum, social space of each caste living within them.[1] The fact that over a period of time the boundaries were mobile meant that cultural ties frequently cut across the existing political boundaries. The coincidence of the cultural and political frontiers, a principle which is explicitly recognized in the Report of the States Reorganization Commission, is, on the whole, a new event in Indian history.

A natural consequence of the territorial limits imposed by the political system on the horizontal tendency of castes was the stimulus

[1] In Kerala, however, the Nambudri Brahmins were superior to the territorial cleavages. See Dr. E. Miller's essay "Village Structure in North Kerala" in *India's Villages*, Ed. M. N. Srinivas, Bombay, 1960.

it gave to castes living in an area to cooperate with each other. Occupational specialization stressed this interdependence, as each caste was dependent for its livelihood on the work done by the other castes. Again, the fact that the members of a caste were all competitors for the goods and services offered by the other castes, meant that relations between the former involved conflict. This tendency of economic ties to cut across caste barriers was also supported by political and religious ties. It was the establishment of Pax Britannica which set the castes free from the territorial limitations inherent in the pre-British political system. British rule freed the jinn from the bottle.

The building of roads all over India, and the introduction of railways, postage, telegraph, cheap paper, and printing—especially in the regional languages—enabled castes to organize as they had never done before. A postcard carried news of a caste meeting, and the railway enabled members scattered in far-flung villages to come together when necessary, while the availability of cheap newsprint facilitated the founding of caste journals, whose aim was to promote the interests of their respective castes. It is usual to point out that railways and factories relax rules of pollution regarding eating and drinking and other forms of contact. But that is only one side of the story. The availability of cheap paper enabled caste disputes to be recorded, and this gave permanent form to rules and precedents which were till then dependent upon the fallible, and therefore challengeable, memory of elders. I learn that several castes in Gujarat have had their "constitutions" printed.

The effects of British rule upon the caste system have been discussed with much erudition and ability by Professor G. S. Ghurye,[2] and I do not propose to cover the same ground here. However, I shall draw freely upon the material brought to light by him to make my points.

It is widely held that the civil and penal codes introduced by the British over the subcontinent of India took away much of the power previously exercised by caste panchayats. The British also introduced a new principle of justice, viz., that all men are equal before the law, and that the nature of a wrong is not affected by the caste of the person who is committing it, or by the caste of the person against whom it is committed. It is necessary to emphasize in this connection that the use of law courts by some peasants

[2] G. S. Ghurye, *Caste and Class in India*, Bombay, 1952.

did not put an end to caste panchayats. The peasants made use of both the systems of justice. The traditional panchayats, caste as well as village, are still functioning in many parts of the country. This fact is specially relevant in all schemes for the revitalization of panchayats. In certain parts of the country, British rule set in motion economic forces which upset the traditional hierarchy, but this did not necessarily mean that caste was weakened thereby. In fact, it is arguable whether such a disturbance did not actually increase caste-consciousness all round. A low caste which made money as a result of new opportunities presenting themselves to it, made attempts to raise its status *vis-a-vis* the other castes, and this resulted in opposition from the latter. Even eventual consent to such a claim did not lessen immediate opposition. Again, it is important to note that the newly-rich castes only pressed for a higher status for themselves—they did not urge that the caste system should be abolished. It is true that the economic forces released under British rule resulted in greater mobility within the caste system, but that is quite different from making progress towards an egalitarian society.

I would like to refer in this connection to Dr. F. G. Bailey's study of an Orissa village.[3] In Bisipara the policy of the then Government of Bengal, of which Orissa was formerly a part, regarding the sale of liquor resulted in the sudden enrichment of two low castes, the Boad Distillers and the Ganjam Distillers. The prosperity of these two groups resulted in disequilibrium, as they both wanted to lay claim to having higher status than before. Previously, in that village, the Warriors owned all the land, but by 1910 when prohibition was introduced, the Boad Distillers owned more land than anyone else. The acquisition of land by the two castes was followed by the Sanskritization of their custom, ritual, and way of life, and all this was part of the process of stating their claim to being a high caste.[4]

While the two Distiller castes have succeeded in raising themselves up, the Boad Outcastes, an Untouchable caste, the members of which made money by trading in hides, found that Sanskritization did not help them. Their claims for a higher position in the hier-

[3] Dr. Bailey made a field study of Bisipara, a village in Phulbani District in Orissa, during the years 1952-53. See his book *Caste and the Economic Frontier*, Manchester, 1957.

[4] See Chapter 2.

archy are opposed by everyone, including other Untouchable groups such as the Sweepers, whose economic position has not improved. The Boad Outcastes are getting increasingly estranged from all local castes, and they are seeking the help of officials and the law courts to secure the rights which the Constitution of India guarantees to them. The special difficulties in the way of the Untouchables' raising their collective status heighten inter-caste tensions.

Increased economic mobility led to increased social mobility, and the traditional process of Sanskritization ensured that such mobility did not lead to revolution. But Untouchables by and large seem to be unable to take advantage of it. This is one indication that the problem of the Untouchables is different from that of the other low castes; the latter have a means of pushing themselves up in the system, while the former do not.[5]

The decennial census, introduced by the British, recorded caste, and it unwittingly came to the aid of social mobility. Prosperous low castes, and even those which were not prosperous, sought to call themselves by new and high-sounding Sanskrit names. Getting the names recorded in the census was part of the struggle to achieve a higher status than before.

While British rule occasionally did confer economic benefits on low castes, it was more usual for these benefits to go to those castes which were already at the top of the hierarchy. It must be remembered that in the example cited above, ideas regarding pollution prevented the higher castes from getting into the liquor and hides trade. In other works, the institution of caste obstructed their benefiting from the new economic opportunities. But the same institution benefited the higher castes in certain other fields. Western education provided an indispensable passport to these fields, and the high castes which had a tradition of literacy, such as the Brahmin, Vaishya, and Kayastha, were in a more advantageous position to exploit the new opportunities than those which did not have such a tradition. Members from the former privileged castes became clerks, schoolmasters, officials, lawyers, and doctors. The Vaishyas or Banias naturally led the other castes in taking advantage of the new commercial opportunities offered by British

[5] See, however, Dr. A. C. Mayer's paper, "Some Hierarchical Aspects of Caste," in *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, XII (1956), p. 139: "... The Balais are trying to move from the Sudra-Harijan *varna* to the Sudra *varna*."

rule. The bulk of the new intelligentsia came from the three groups of castes, and the leadership of the nationalist movement fell mainly upon their shoulders. It is not surprising that they were disliked by the British rulers. The upper castes were not only the first nationalists but they were also conscious of the fact that they were Hindus. This was specially true of the Brahmin, who enjoyed a privileged position in the traditional hierarchy. European missionaries have abundantly testified to the hold the Brahmin had over the bulk of the Hindus, and this hold had to be broken if Christianity was to make headway in India.

The policy pursued by the British Government in India of giving preference to the low castes was in accordance with its humanitarian sentiments, and it also had the effect of making the lower castes look up to the British for protection. It drove a wedge between the higher and lower castes, and this was especially seen in peninsular India. The leaders of the Brahmins and the other high castes were to be found in the nationalist movement. It was Mahatma Gandhi who was chiefly responsible for carrying nationalism to all sections of the population.

Professor Ghurye writes that before the Indian Mutiny of 1857, the Bengal Army was composed largely of Brahmins and Rajputs, and that soldiers belonging to these castes took a leading part in the Mutiny. Soon there was an agitation in England to rid the army of the higher castes. A commission was appointed under Lord Peel to go into the question of reorganization of the Indian Army. The Commission, after recording evidence from high British officials who had served in India, recommended that "the native Indian Army should be composed of different nationalities and castes and as a general rule mixed promiscuously through each regiment." Ever since then the Indian Army has been steadily purged of the higher castes. Professor Ghurye thinks that the Mutiny drove home to the British rulers that the safety of British dominion in India was very closely connected with keeping the Indian people divided on the lines of caste. He quotes the opinions of contemporary Britons like Sir Lepel Griffin and James Kerr, who knew that caste divided the Indian people into small groups and obstructed the emergence of a nationalist sentiment. Towards the closing years of the nineteenth century, the maxim of "divide and rule" began to be openly preached by historians and journalists.[6]

[6] Ghurye, *op. cit.*, pp. 175-6.

Throughout Indian history attempts have been made to reject Brahminical supremacy, but the non-Brahmin movement of the present century differs from earlier movements not only in regard to scale and intensity but also as to ideology. The speeches made by the leaders of the non-Brahmin movement in Madras in the twenties of this century, for instance, reveal the influence of the liberal and radical thought of Western Europe.[7] The non-Brahmin leaders asserted that they were as good as the Brahmins, and that they wanted the British rulers to give them preferential treatment for a time in order that this could become an established fact.

The non-Brahmin movement of peninsular India was the response of a down-trodden section of Hindu society to the challenge of caste in the new context of British rule and Western liberal-rationalist ideology. One of the founders of this movement was Jyotirao Phule of Poona, a man of the Gardener caste, who founded the Satya Shodak Samaj in 1873 with the object of asserting the worth of a human being irrespective of his birth in a particular caste. In certain respects, Phule's reforms anticipate the programme of the non-Brahmin movement in Madras. He urged the non-Brahmins not to engage Brahmin priests to conduct their ritual. He saw the need for education of the non-Brahmins, and in 1848 he started a school for non-Brahmin boys and girls. In 1851, he started a school for Untouchables in Poona. He demanded adequate representation for members of all castes in the services and local bodies.

Prof. Ghurye's view is, however, controverted by Prof. J. H. Hutton in a letter (dated 24th August, 1957) to me. I quote relevant parts from the letter. "It was the *lower* castes that were eliminated generally (from the Indian army after the Mutiny). I think the policy after the Mutiny was to mix the castes but in 1884 the enlistment of certain low castes was prohibited. In 1891 the 'class company' system was introduced which separated castes within the regiment and there was a further elimination of lower castes, and in 1893, in the Bengal Army at any rate, the 'class company' system was superseded by a 'class regiment' system—Brahmans, Rajputs, Muslims, Jats and Gurkhas being recruited into separate regiments. I do not think your general argument is affected, but I do suspect you of a dislike of inaccuracy as to facts. I believe the army did give up recruiting the *Bihari* Brahmins who were very prominent in the Mutiny army, but Rajputs were always regarded as an important source of recruits, and so were Maratha Brahmins."

[7] See the *Proceedings of the First Provincial Conference of the League of Non-Brahmin Youth* (Central), Madras, 1927: and the *Administrative Report of the League of Non-Brahmin Youth*, Madras, 1926-27.

The measures which Phule advocated in the second and third quarters of the nineteenth century were to become the main items in the programme of the non-Brahmin parties of Bombay and Madras in the first half of this century. Professor Ghurye observes that Phule's demand for special representation for non-Brahmins in the services and local bodies went unheeded till the last decade of the nineteenth century, when the Maharaja of Kolhapur (Shri Sahu Chhatrapati) took up the non-Brahmin cause. Thanks mainly to his efforts, special representation through mixed electorates was conceded to the non-Brahmins in the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms. These reforms divided the people of Bombay into three political tiers: the first tier consisted of Brahmins and Allied Castes; the second consisted of the Intermediate Castes, the Marathas and others; and finally, the Backward Classes, including Untouchables. This principle was also made use of in appointments to Government posts. Professor Ghurye quotes a resolution of the Finance Department of the Government of Bombay, dated September 17, 1923, prohibiting the recruitment of Brahmins and Allied Castes to the lower services, till a certain proportion of the posts were held by the Intermediate and Backward Castes. This policy of reserving a certain percentage of the posts for the non-Brahmin castes was followed by other provincial governments. The logical consequence of this policy was seen in Madras as early as 1924. "The hundreds of small communities into which Indian society is divided were not slow to take advantage of the opportunity which was conveniently afforded them, and began to clamour for special representation in the legislature, local bodies, the public services and even educational institutions. The Government, in which also the non-Brahmin element was very influential, tried to satisfy the ever-increasing demand for the plums of office, but naturally could not succeed. It created jealousies and enmities which have now reacted with disastrous effect on the party [the non-Brahmin Party]."[8] About the same time the Chairman of the Reception Committee of the Meeting of the Madras Non-Brahmin Party in 1924, made a strong appeal "to abandon the communal policy pursued hitherto and to transform the party into an organization representing the forces working for reform along constitutional lines into which everyone without distinction of caste, religion or colour would have free

[8] Quoted from the *Indian Daily Mail* (Bombay), October 14, 1924. See Ghurye, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

admission."[9] Twelve years later, in the 1936-37 elections, the non-Brahmin Party suffered a decisive defeat at the hands of the Congress. This happened in both Madras and Bombay, but it did not mean that the non-Brahmin movement came to an end. The more moderate non-Brahmins entered the Congress and soon dominated it. In Madras the extreme non-Brahmins under the leadership of Shri E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker joined the Dravida Kazhagam, a militant, atheistic, anti-Aryan, anti-North Indian, anti-Hindi, and anti-Brahmin movement. The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, an offshoot of the Dravida Kazhagam, claims to be more "progressive" than the latter, admitting even Brahmins as members. It is also pro-nationalization and anti-landowner in outlook.

One feature of the peninsular non-Brahmin movement may be disposed of now. The unifying feature of that movement was dislike of, if not hatred for, the Brahmin. Right up to the beginning of the First World War, the Brahmins dominated the administration and the liberal professions everywhere in peninsular India excepting Kerala. It is alleged that during the period of Brahminical domination, favouritism towards Brahmins and discrimination against non-Brahmins were both widespread. When power and influence passed into the hands of the non-Brahmins, they seem to have harassed the Brahmins working under them. Professor Ghurye quotes from the memorandum of the Government of Bombay to the Indian Statutory Commission in 1928 to show that in those District School Boards in which the non-Brahmins were in a majority, attempts were made to oust Brahmins regardless of all consideration of efficiency.[10] Anti-Brahminism assumed a violent form in the riots which occurred in Kolhapur and elsewhere following the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi. Anti-Brahmin demonstrations, the looting and burning of Brahmin houses, printing presses, factories, and shops were widespread. The Brahmin-owned and -edited Marathi press had been very critical of Mahatma Gandhi for some weeks before his assassination.[11] Shri A. B. Latthe, one of the leaders of the non-Brahmin movement in Bombay in the twenties and thirties, commented on the riots : "As an humble friend of the

[9] See the reports mentioned in footnote 7. See also N. Rama Rao, *Kelavu Nenapugalu*, Bangalore, 1954, p. 11.

[10] Ghurye, *op. cit.*, pp. 175, 183.

[11] See M. L. P. Patterson, "Caste and Politics in Maharashtra", *Economic Weekly*, Vol. VI, No. 39 (September 15, 1954), pp. 1065-7.

non-Brahmin movement of thirty years ago, I still think the movement was essentially justified, but later on it degenerated into the naked communalism of several non-Brahmin communities which ultimately broke it up. The vicarious punishment of all the Brahmins for the sins of a few among them is foolish, and hatred of one community against another is suicidal to democracy. The days of caste oligarchies have gone and cannot and ought not to be revived. Those in the State who encourage narrow communal pride are the worst enemies of the people and the State."[12]

I shall now try to demonstrate that the power and activity of caste has increased in proportion as political power passed increasingly to the people from the rulers. The transfer of power to the people began under the British, and it finds its culmination in the Constitution of the Republic of India, under which every adult has a vote which is exercised quinquennially at the elections. I shall consider each linguistic region of peninsular India, and then refer briefly, and I fear very inadequately, to India north of the Vindhyas. It is hardly necessary for me to add that this is due to my ignorance of the North and to nothing else.

The non-Brahmin movement in peninsular India is over a century old. I have already referred to Phule's efforts in Poona in the 1840's. About the same time in Madras, the artisan castes made a representation to the Board of Revenue to the effect that all men should be appointed to public offices without distinction and to the destruction of Brahminical monopoly. The movement gathered strength slowly. According to Professor Ghurye, Phule's ideas did not make progress among non-Brahmins for several years after he had propounded them, but caste-consciousness seems to have suddenly become sharp in 1916 when Montague arrived in India to consult the people and the Government of India about the future form of government. But the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms were not announced till after the end of the World War I. Non-Brahmin leaders in peninsular India felt that the granting of power to their countrymen might lead to a Brahminical tyranny. The Maharaja of Kolhapur pleaded before the announcement of the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms for "Communal Representation" for at least ten years if Home Rule was not to culminate in oligarchy.[13] On the occasion of the celebration of the tenth birthday of the

[12] Ghurye, *op. cit.*, p. 202.
[13] *Ibid.*, pp. 179, 197.

Madras non-Brahmin party paper, *Justice*, the Raja of Panagal declared that at the conclusion of the First World War, the non-Brahmin leaders felt that a certain amount of political power would be given by the British to Indians. "The late leaders felt that before any political power is conceded to the people, the latter or a majority of them must be in a position to assert themselves against any one community which would try to appropriate it to itself."[14] The newspaper *Justice* was started on 26th February 1917, specifically to advance non-Brahmin interests, and it was followed by the starting of three other newspapers, two in Tamil (*Kudiarasu* and *Dravidar*) and one in Telugu (*Samadarshini*), all with the same end in view. The inter-war years may be described as a period of intense anti-Brahminism in the South. The leaders of the non-Brahmin party collaborated with the Government, and took measures to reserve a certain percentage of posts in the administration and seats in the local bodies and legislatures for the non-Brahmins. The principle of reservation was also extended to seats in educational institutions.

In a penetrating article entitled "Caste and Politics in Maharashtra," Miss Maureen Patterson has analysed the forces of caste underlying politics in Maharashtra (excluding Vidarbha and Marathwada).[15] Miss Patterson discusses the part played by the three important castes, viz., Brahmins, Marathas, and Mahars, in the politics of Maharashtra. The Brahmins were the first to become westernized in Maharashtra, and this resulted in a near monopoly of posts for them in the new set-up. The early political leaders were mostly Konkanastha Brahmins. The Brahmins constitute only 4 per cent of the population of this region, while the Marathas constitute 25 per cent, the Kunbis who wish to pass off for Marathas, 8 per cent, and the Mahars, 10 per cent. The Marathas are landowners in the rural areas and have not yet taken kindly to education in spite of the pioneering efforts of their caste leader, the Maharaja of Kolhapur. They have only 7 per cent literates as compared with the Mahars who have 11 per cent literates. The ties of the Mahars with the land do not seem to be as strong as those of the Marathas—traditionally, the former were hereditary village watchmen owning little or no land. The Mahars, like the Marathas, saw army service

[14] *Administrative Report of the League of Non-Brahmin Youth*, Madras, 1926-27.

[15] M. L. P. Patterson, *loc. cit.*, pp. 1065-7.

in the First World War, and large numbers of Mahars are to be found now in Bombay engaged as labourers in textile mills.

Miss Patterson tells us that in the twenties, Marathas in Kolhapur, Satara, and other towns made a concerted effort to drive out Brahmins from their positions as priests, petty government officials, and teachers.[16]

In Maharashtra as in Madras, the Congress achieved a notable victory at the 1936-37 elections and the non-Brahmin party candidates suffered a severe defeat. According to Miss Patterson, the Congress was able to attract Marathas and other non-Brahmins into its fold partly because its leader Mahatma Gandhi was not a Brahmin. In her opinion, "All along, in various ways, caste has exerted an important though at times subtle effect on the Congress organization in Maharashtra" (p. 1066). In April 1948, a large block of the Maharashtra Congress left it to form the Peasants' and Workers' Party. The leaders of the new party were Shri K. Jedhe and Shri S. S. More. Miss Patterson says that "The formation of this party may be regarded both as an attempt to protest against what was considered overtly 'Capitalist' domination of the Congress and to by-pass what was claimed to be continued Brahmin control over positions of leadership in the Maharashtra Congress organization" (p. 1067). In 1954, the P. W. P. split into two groups, one led by Shri Jedhe, and the other by Shri More. The former rejoined the Congress in August 1954, while a hard core of leftists remained with Shri More in the P. W. P.

The recent movement in favour of the union of all Marathi-speaking areas in a single state seemed to unite most Maharashtrians, irrespective of caste. There was, however, one notable exception: it was Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the leader of the Scheduled Castes. He said, "In a monolithic Maharashtra, Marathas having the absolute majority, would dominate." He added further that history had shown that the minorities, especially the Scheduled Castes and Tribes, would not get justice at the hands of the Marathas. Dr. Ambedkar wanted Maharashtra to be divided into three Marathi-speaking areas, East, West, and Central, with a view to seeing that

[16] It is interesting to note that a similar move was afoot in Madras Province. The leaders of the non-Brahmin movement in Madras were in touch with their counterparts in Belgaum, Satara, and Amaravati. See the *Proceedings of the First Provincial Conference of the League of Non-Brahmin Youth* (Central), Madras, 1927.

the Marathas did not get a chance to dominate the Scheduled Castes and Tribes.[17]

Mr. Selig S. Harrison, in a recent paper entitled "Caste and the Andhra Communists,"[18] has made a brilliant analysis of the forces at work in the politics of Andhra State. I make no apology for quoting extensively from Mr. Harrison's paper : it provides conclusive evidence of the decisive role played by caste in the politics of South India. Mr. Harrison writes : "As an example of Hindu caste discipline in political motion, the post-war decade in Andhra merits special attention. *Caste has played so fundamental a role during this period that this examination becomes in effect a case history in the impact of caste on India's representative institutions*" (p. 379, italics mine).

I can only present here a brief summary of Mr. Harrison's paper. According to him, most of the Communist leaders of Andhra belong to the peasant caste, Kammas. "Since the founding of the Andhra Communist party in 1934, the party leadership has been the property of a single subcaste, the Kamma landlords, who dominate the Krishna-Godavari delta. This fact carries enormous importance in view of the rising influence of the Kammas in Andhra life. The war and post-war years were a boom period for the Kamma farmers, who own an estimated 80 per cent of the fertile delta land. High prices for both food and cash crops made many Indian peasant proprietor castes newly rich, but for the Kammas, presiding over land as productive as any in all India, the boom was especially potent" (p. 381).

While the Kammas dominate the Communist Party the rival landowning caste of Reddis dominates the Congress. Kamma-Reddi rivalry is an old affair, and the present-day political competition between them "is only a modern recurrence of an historic pattern dating back to the fourteenth century" (p. 382). "Both Kammas and Reddis were probably warriors in the service of the early Andhra kings. Later they became farmers, some feudal overlords and others small peasant proprietors who to this day take part in the cultivation of their land. Between them they dominated rural Andhra, leaving Brahmins beyond the pale of economic power in the countryside" (p. 383).

[17] The *Times of India*, October 1, 1955.

[18] *American Political Science Review* (June 1956), pp. 378-404. See also his recent book *India: the Most Dangerous Decades*, Oxford University Press, Madras, 1960.

These two famous castes are concentrated in two different regions of Andhra—the Kammas in fertile deltaic Andhra and the Reddis in the five Rayalaseema Districts of West Andhra.[19] The deltaic region seems to have been called once upon a time "Kamma Rashtra," while Rayalaseema is in parlance referred to as "Reddiseema." Both the castes are, however, rurally oriented. Political awareness in Andhra, as in other parts of peninsular India, came first to the Brahmin. Like the Maratha, the deep chthonic roots of the Kamma and Reddi seem to have come in the way of their acquiring English education. "Only about 1900 A.D., Kammas awakened to the fact that without English education they cannot better their position. The few educated Kammas who joined government service had to struggle hard to come up due to lack of patronage and the opposition of Brahmin vested interests."[20]

The educational advancement of the two castes only increased their mutual rivalry. But the two combined as members of the Justice Party in Madras to oust the Brahmins from power and position in Andhra. Between 1934 and World War II, the Reddis gained control of the Congress, and the Kammas, of the Communist Party.

I must mention here that I do not find Mr. Harrison's explanation for the two leading peasant castes' joining rival political parties entirely convincing. According to him, the fertile deltaic area of the Circars—incidentally the region of the heaviest density in Andhra, from 900 to 1,200 persons per square mile as compared with 316 in the rest of Andhra—is the centre of Andhra's intellectual and political ferment. The Brahmins in this area were the first to be drawn into the Congress, and the challenge to the Brahmins came from the leading local non-Brahmin caste of Kammas. "In addition, in the delta's legions of landless laborers there was the grist of a mass movement plain to any Marxist intellectual looking for a cause" (p. 384). According to Mr. Harrison, the Reddis who lived in the politically backward area of Rayalaseema, gravitated almost by default into the Congress.

[19] This kind of relationship between a caste and a region is widespread in India, and it should be noted that regional claims are often only a disguise for caste claims. The conferring of vast powers on panchayats, which is a widespread feature of modern Indian administration, will only place great temptations before the locally dominant caste to use the money and power in favour of its members and at the expenses of the other and dependent castes.

[20] Harrison, *loc. cit.*, p. 384.

This account of Mr. Harrison is not consistent with his earlier statement : "Both Kammas and Reddis, pushing forward with the anti-Brahmin movement that swept all South India, supported the Andhra branch of the short-lived Justice party" (p. 384). The latter statement implies that there was no lag between Kammas and Reddis in political consciousness. A simpler explanation, and one that is more consistent with traditional Reddi-Kamma rivalry, is that the two castes fell apart after pushing the Brahmin out. One joined the Communists and the other the Congress. The two rival castes now found a new field for their rivalry.

Between 1948 and 1951, Communism in Andhra took a violent form. "This was the so-called Telengana movement, organized along standard Communist guerilla lines with wholesale land redistribution and parallel village governments. Clusters of villages in the delta and nearly all Warangal and Nalgonda districts in Hyderabad went under Communist control from 1948 through 1950. Andhra and Telengana Communist leaders directed a two-way offensive, north into Telengana and south into the delta, from a 40-village base of operations in Munagala Jungle in north-west Krishna District. Communist squads raided villages by night, police battalions by day. When Indian Army troops conducted their 1948 "police action" against the Nizam of Hyderabad, they stayed on in Warangal and Nalgonda to drive the Communists out. It took them until 1951 to restore normal local government (p. 390).

Communist violence did not, however, affect the Kamma landlords, and this was noticed by Shri B. T. Ranadive, then Secretary of the Communist Party of India. He said that the Andhra Communist Party was dominated by "rural intellectuals, sons of rich peasants and middle peasants .... The party politically based itself on the vacillating politics of the middle peasants and allowed itself to be influenced even by rich ideology."[21]

The Kammas supported the Communists in the 1951 elections. "Whatever the understanding between the Communists and Kamma patriarchs, a significant section of the Kammas plainly put their funds, influence, and votes behind the Communist Kamma candidates. This factor appears to have tipped the scales in the delta.... While the Kamma vote was divided, the share of Kamma support

[21] Harrison, *loc. cit.*, p. 391, quoting from the *Communist*, II (June-July 1949), 34.

won by the Communists provided the margin of victory in 14 of the 25 delta general constituencies where Communist deputies were elected" (p. 395). Mr. Harrison states that in a substantial number of cases powerful Kamma supporters gave even more decisive support to the Communist candidates, viz., that of identification with village-level authority. Kamma influence is so evenly spread over the delta that even in those deltaic constituencies where non-Kamma Communists were successful, Kamma support was probably extended.

In the 1955 elections, the Congress sent one of their ablest organizers, Shri S. K. Patil, to organize the party to defeat the Communists at the polls. The Andhra Congress closed its ranks, and this minimized the splitting of votes among a number of candidates, which was a feature of the 1951 elections. The Congress also secured the support of the outstanding Kamma leader, Professor N. G. Ranga, and his support was a crucial factor in the defeat of the Communist candidates. Shri S. K. Patil matched caste with caste in the choice of candidates, and this ensured that the Communist candidate did not have the advantage of caste against his Congress rival. Finally, vigorous anti-Communist propaganda seemed to split the Kammas in their support of the Communists. The Communist press bitterly complained that the propertied interests had ganged up against them. On his side, Shri N. G. Ranga showed that he could drive a hard bargain for his caste within Congress councils.

What will be the pattern of forces in the new Andhra State? The *Times of India* of August 25, 1956, reported that there were two groups, one supporting the then Chief Minister Shri B. Gopala Reddi, and the other supporting the then Deputy Chief Minister, Shri N. Sanjiva Reddi, for the leadership of the Congress Legislative Party in the enlarged Andhra Pradesh. In this contest, the decision of the Telega subcaste (with twenty-two members in the Legislature) to support Shri Gopala Reddi strengthened the latter's chances of success. The followers of Shri N. G. Ranga also decided to support Shri Gopala Reddi. The Harijans were deliberating as to whom to support, and it was likely that their vote would go to the highest bidder. In Telengana, the leaders in the political field are the Reddis, who are distinct from the Rayalaseema Reddis. The Telengana Brahmins are their local rivals.

A complicated pattern of alliances and rivalries is likely to emerge in the new Andhra. Mr. Harrison writes, "Already the Reddi-

Brahmin rivals in Telengana and the Kamma-Reddi antagonists in Andhra can be seen each jockeying to establish ties across the border. To complicate matters still more, the Telengana Communist leadership lacks caste homogeneity. Ravi Narayana Reddi and a Brahmin, D. V. Rao, lead rival factions. How will these rivals adjust to their new common relationship to the delta Communist leaders?" (p. 404).

It is to be regretted that analyses of elections similar to Mr. Harrison's are not available for other parts of India. But some idea of the forces at work in the 1951-52 elections could be obtained even from newspaper reports. It is relevant to mention here that it is widely believed that the Congress Party in Madras is pursuing in the spheres of education and recruitment to services a policy which meets with support from the Dravida Kazhagam. In fact, as mentioned earlier, the success of the Congress in Madras is partly attributed to its pursuing a policy which makes a non-Brahmin party unnecessary. In an article entitled the "National Scene" in the *Times of India* of July 12, 1955, "Darem" wrote : "But it is futile denying that a large majority of the people (which means the non-Brahman majority) in Tamilnad sympathize with the Kazhagam's ideology. Indeed the present Chief Minister of Madras (Shri K. Kamaraj) owes his return to the Assembly to the support of the Kazhagam in the election. It is further believed that a majority of Congressmen actively back the Kazhagam."

During the elections the Communist Party of India, in accordance with its policy of supporting candidates and parties having a "social base," supported the Dravida Kazhagam candidates. The Communists argued that though the Kazhagam was in origin a result of depressed non-Brahmins rising against Brahmin privilege, it had an economic and social basis, and a "progressive" or Leftist ideal (the *Times of India*, January 2, 1952). In the same report, the *Times of India* correspondent remarked that the Scheduled Castes Federation was very powerful in Madras, and that the Harijans, constituted as they were of landless labourers and other impoverished sections of the community, were attracted to the extreme Left in thousands. The poorer Christians, mostly converts from Harijan castes, were also supporting the Communists, though in their case there was the counter influence of the Church to the Right.

The Vanniya Kula Kshatriyas are dominant caste of petty landowners and peasants in the four districts of North Arcot, South Arcot,

Salem, and Chingleput. In 1944 this caste organized itself as a pressure group to promote its interests. But just before the elections, the caste split into two parties, now known as the Toilers' Party and the other as the Commonwealth Party. The former had Leftist leanings and was active in South Arcot and Salem, while the latter had no particular programme. The Toilers' Party was supported at the elections by both the Kisan Mazdoor Party and the United Front of Leftists. The *Times of India* correspondent remarked, "It is astonishing how much caste feeling is being evoked by the elections" (January 2, 1952).

I have referred earlier to the Dravida Kazhagam movement in Madras. Sometime in June 1956, the founder of the Kazhagam, Shri E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker, declared that he had given up the goal of Dravidistan, a sovereign state consisting of Tamilnad, Kerala, Karnatak, and Andhra, the four Dravidian-speaking areas of South India. He declared himself only in favour of Tamilnad, a tacit acknowledgement of the fact that the movement had never made any headway outside Tamil-speaking areas. But the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, an offshoot of the Dravida Kazhagam, has not given up the demand for the creation of Dravidistan. A conference of the D. M. K. held in Trichy in the third week of May 1956, passed a resolution demanding the creation of Dravidistan instead of Dakshina Pradesh.[22] The demand for Dravidistan as distinct from Dakshina Pradesh, is a demand for the creation of a sovereign and independent State. An acute controversy is raging at present between the advocates of Dakshina Pradesh, led by Shri C. Rajagopalachari, and the advocates of a Tamil state, but that need not detain us here. It is relevant to mention that in a recent speech Shri C. Rajagopalachari charged both the D. K. and D. M. K. with "... openly preaching a creed of hatred based on ethnological conjectures and unrecorded and unproved historical conflicts." "It was claimed by these 'hatred-mongers' that the Dravidians were very strong and powerful and that the Aryans, who conquered them, were none else than the forebears of present-day Brahmins. This theory would not stand even half-an-hour's examination." He asked, "Is it not remarkable that this hatred-mongering is going on, meeting with little disapproval or discouragement from those in authority?"[23]

[22] The *Hindu*, May 22, 1956.
[23] The *Hindu*, June 16, 1956.

Caste is omnipresent in modern Mysore. As in Andhra, the Congress Party is dominated by two leading peasant castes, one of which is the Lingayat and the other, Okkaliga. Lingayat-Okkaliga rivalry is colouring every issue, whether it be appointment to government posts or reservation of seats in colleges, or election to local bodies and legislatures. A detailed account of the way in which caste functions in modern Mysore was given sometime ago in the *Economic Weekly*.[24]

The Okkaligas of Mysore are apprehensive that in a large Kannada-speaking State composed of Mysore, Coorg, and South Kanara, and the Kannada-speaking areas of Madras, Hyderabad, and Bombay, they would be dominated by the Lingayats. That is why they wanted Mysore to remain a separate State. They continued to press for this even after the States Reorganization Commission had recommended the creation of a single State embracing all Kannada-speaking areas, including Mysore. It was Shri Hanumanthaiah's support for the S. R. C. proposal which changed the course of events. The supporters of separate Mysore even welcomed the creation of Dakshina Pradesh as a counter to a single Kannada-speaking State—in the former State no single group would be able to dominate. One of the dilemmas of modern India is that while smaller States will make for the more intimate association of the people with the Government, they are also likely to make for the tyranny of the dominant caste. Devolution of power in India is seriously complicated by caste.

That the members of the States Reorganization Commission were keenly aware of the apprehensions of the Okkaligas is evident : "It has been suggested to us that the basic reason why two States have been demanded instead of one is either political or religious apprehension or perhaps a combination of both. It has been estimated that Lingayats or Veerasaivas constitute about 35 to 40 per cent of the population in the Kannada areas outside Mysore at present. The other important section of the Kannadigas, namely, the Vakkaligas, similarly constitute a little less than 29 per cent of the population of Mysore. In the united Karnataka, it has been estimated that a little more than 20 per cent of the population may be Lingayats, between 13 and 14 per cent Vakkaligas, about 17

[24] See "Profile of a Southern State—Mysore," *Economic Weekly*, Vol. VIII, No. 29 (July 21, 1956), pp. 859-65. See also No. 32, p. 943 ; and No. 34, pp. 1005-6.

to 18 per cent Harijans. It is clear that no one community will, therefore, be dominant, and any one section can be reduced to the status of a minority, if other groups combine against it. These estimates of the communal composition of the new State are naturally not firm, because the figures which have been quoted vary considerably. They serve however to illustrate the problem."[25]

Shri Hanumanthaiah's advocacy of the cause of a single Kannada state cost him the Chief Ministership of Mysore. His action has been interpreted as harming Okkaligas. With the approach of the formation of the new state, Okkaliga-Lingayat relations have become bitter. It is likely that in New Mysore besides a straightforward tussle between the two groups there will be regional conflicts. In fact, regionalism will be the pattern in India south of the Vindhyas, if not all over India. This is an inevitable consequence of the formation of large states within the Indian Union. Regionalism is an offspring of linguism, and caste is active in both.

Another feature of modern Mysore is the recognition given to caste in appointments to government posts, seats in medical and engineering colleges, etc. Brahmins may apply for only one in five posts, and only 30 per cent of the seats in medical and engineering colleges are allotted on the basis of merit. (In Andhra, conditions seem to be worse, Brahmins being eligible to apply for only one in seven posts, and only 20 per cent of the seats in colleges being open to competition.) It may be recalled in this connection that Article 29 (2) of the Constitution guaranteeing that "No citizen shall be denied admission into any educational institution maintained by the State or receiving aid out of State funds, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, language or any of them," was amended in 1951 to provide for reservation of seats in schools and colleges on the ground of caste. The Constitution (First Amendment) Act was passed in 1951 and added the following to Article 15 of the Constitution : "(4) Nothing in this Article or Clause (2) of Article 29 shall prevent the State from making any special provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes." The Amendment Act arose out of the case of Champakam Doraira-

[25] *Report of the States Reorganization Commission*, Chapter IV, p. 91, para. 324 According to the 1931 Census, the percentages of Lingayats, Okkaligas and Harijans in the areas proposed to be included in the Karnataka State were 17, 11, and 13, irrespectively.

jan *v.* the State of Madras. Miss Dorairajan, a Brahmin girl, was refused admission to a college in Madras, and she filed a writ petition. The Madras High Court held that the Communal Government Order under which the action was taken was *ultra vires* of the Constitution. The Madras Government appealed to the Supreme Court, which upheld the decision of the Madras High Court. Their Lordships of the Supreme Court declared that the classification made in the Madras Government order regarding admission to colleges proceed on the basis of religion, race and caste, and was therefore opposed to the Constitution, and constituted a clear violation of the Fundamental Rights guaranteed to the citizens under Article 29 (2) of the Constitution, and therefore void under Article 13. The Amendment to the Constitution was prompted by the decision of the Supreme Court.

Kerala, or the Malayalam-speaking area, on the West coast of South India, differs in certain important respects from the rest of South India. For instance, it includes a large and influential Christian population, and in the northern part of the State, a well-knit group of Muslims. The Nambudri Brahmins of Kerala, who may be said to be Brahmins among Brahmins, have not taken to Western education in the way their eastern and northern counterparts have done. The Nayars are the dominant group among Hindus in education, administration, and politics. The Izhavans or Tiyyans, a "backward" caste with the traditional occupation of toddy-tapping, have Sanskritized their way of life under the leadership of their revered leader, the late Shri Narayana Guru. Among Hindus, there is a certain amount of rivalry between Nayars and Izhavans. Kerala teaches us that it is not so much the ritual superiority of the Brahmin that is resented by others as his political and economic domination.

In the 1951 elections, the major cleavage in Travancore Cochin was between Hindus and Christians. For a whole year before the elections, the Democratic Congress carried on a steady and virulent campaign that the local Indian National Congress was dominated by Christians. This led to the departure of some Nayars and Izhavans from the National Congress. Then came a sudden electoral alliance between the National Congress and Democratic Congress, which confused many followers of the former. Many Izhavans turned Left. The Christian vote did not go to the National Congress because the State Government tried to obtain control of teaching

in schools, which are mostly run by Christian missionaries. The Church resisted this attempt by the State, and the Government of India reversed the decision of the State Government. The clergy and the Catholic Congress supported Independent Catholics against the Congress nominees. Independent Catholics in Trichur called themselves the Cochin Party. When Hindus saw that the clergy were backing Catholic candidates, they voted against the Catholic nominees of the Congress and supported Hindu Independents and Leftists. The Congress vote was thus split. Five of eleven Independents elected to the Assembly were from Trichur.[26]

A report in the *Times of India* of August 27, 1956, contained a revealing analysis of the forces at work in Travancore-Cochin State since its inception :

> For a long time Travancore and Cochin were two separate States ruled by two royal families and their advisors, called Dewans. In those days, it was not a sin to distribute favours. At least, the royal right was not challenged. The best available place to distribute favours was the expanding field of public administration.
>
> When self-rule replaced autocracy, it inherited the old machinery intact. But the units and components of this machinery were never seriously disturbed. In fact, some of the critics of ministerial rule in the State point out that the services enjoyed more opportunities for favouritism during the initial rise and temporary decline of representative government here.
>
> The public, the newspapers and the people's representatives, all tended to identify and equate Government employees with this or that community. Appointments and promotions of clerks and sub-inspectors of police became front-page news and reached the agenda of Cabinet meetings. The failures and fortunes of Government employees were identified with the failures and fortunes of their respective communities. The employees enjoying rare privileges soon searched for and always succeeded in getting "god-fathers", promoters and sponsors, among the leaders of public life.
>
> In this small and compact area, everyone knew everyone else. Family connections and communal party were much too important. Personal considerations and obligations held sway over

[26] The *Times of India*, January 26, 1952.

efficiency and independence. Progress stopped. Inertia set in. This is the critical analysis of the recent history of the State Services by responsible officials.

Into this stagnant pool flew the Presidental Agent, Mr. P. S. Rau. He detected the malaise. His writ that the President's administration shall be strictly impartial ran through all departments. He felt that being a newcomer from beyond the State's borders he could do something in this direction. Mere seniority would not be the sole criterion for promotions, he said. Efficiency would be the keynote of the administration.

I may be permitted to remark here that it is not unlikely that the absence of powerful Brahmin groups in the North has prevented the emergence of an anti-Brahmin movement, and this has probably led to the popular impression that caste is more powerful South of the Vindhyas than to the North. There are signs, however, that caste is becoming stronger in the North. Whether caste conflict will ever become as strong as it is in the South today, remains to be seen.

Strong caste rivalries were seen in the Bihar Congress during the 1951 elections. The three chief castes were : Rajput (led by the then Finance and Food Minister, Shri A. N. Sinha); Bhumihar (led by the then Chief Minister, Dr. Shri Kishna Sinha); and Kayastha (led by Shri K. B. Sahay, Minister for Revenue and Excise). A *Times of India* report (January 3, 1952), stated that many Congressmen were supporting surreptitiously, and in some cases even openly, many Independent candidates and disgruntled Congressmen standing against the party's official nominees. In short, Rajputs supported Rajputs, and Bhumihars supported Bhumihars, occasionally in contravention of party loyalty. The Kayasthas, however, were split into two groups, one of them supporting Shri A. N. Sinha. While some Congressmen supported caste fellows at the expense of the party nominees, some members of the party of Rajput landlords, the Janata Party (led by the Raja of Ramgarh) expressed their preference for Shri A. N. Sinha. The Congress exploited the principle of caste in the elections. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur was brought to tour the tribal areas to wean away tribesmen, a good many of whom are Christians, from a separatist demand for a tribal state, to be called Jharkhand. The leader of the Jharhand Party, Shri Jaipal Singh, himself a Christian tribal, wanted

a new State to be carved out of the tribal areas of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Orissa.

In 1951 there was in existence in U. P. an organization called the Shoshita Sangh, comprising the lower castes, which had as its aim the improvement of the conditions of the latter.[27] This seems to be but one indication of the fact that caste-consciousness is on the rise in U. P. The tussle between Rajputs and Chamars for political power is likely to get keener in the near future. In the rural areas Rajputs, who were until recently an exclusive group, seem to be more willing nowadays to grant Rajput status to aspiring groups, with a view to strengthening themselves at the next elections.

An incidental effect of the abolition of the zamindari system in parts of North India was the outbreak of dacoity in parts of U. P. and Madhya Bharat. The dacoit gangs in U. P. were recruited almost exclusively from among the Thakur, Mallah, and Gujar castes, which collaborated effectively to protect the criminals wherever they went. Punitive police were posted in the affected areas during December 1952-January 1953, by the U. P. Government. Similarly, in Madhya Bharat, the Rajputs, Thakurs, and Gujars who were adversely affected by the post-Independence agrarian reforms took to dacoity.[28] In the latter half of 1952, in certain villages in Bhind and Morena Districts of Madhya Bharat, Harijans were frequently victims of loot, arson, and murder at the hands of the dacoits. These assaults were described by the *Times of India* correspondent as a kind of "class war" waged by the Zamindars (who had suffered by the abolition of zamindari) against the people (Harijans) whom they had oppressed formerly.[29]

In the Punjab, the conflict is not between castes but between two systems of castes—the Hindu and Sikh. The Hindu-Sikh conflict took on the guise of a linguistic conflict, and this was in spite of the fact that "the Punjabi and Hindi languages as spoken in the Punjab are akin to each other and are both well understood by all sections of the people of the State."[30] "The problem of language in the Punjab is, therefore, one of the scripts...."[31] The Sikhs wanted Gurmukhi script while the Hindus wanted the Devanagari Script.

[27] The *Times of India*, November 14, 1951.
[28] The *Times of India*, January 26, 1953.
[29] The *Times of India*, November 25, 1952.
[30] *Report of the States Reorganization Commission*, p. 141, S. 520.
[31] *Ibid.*, p. 143, S. 527.

The States Reorganization Commission turned down both the Sikh demand for the creation of a Punjabi-speaking State as well as the Hindu demand for a Maha (bigger) Punjab State. They proposed the creation of a new Punjab in which were merged the existing States of the Punjab (except the Lohari sub-tehsil of Hissar District), Pepsu, and Himachal Pradesh. The Commission criticized Sikh as well as Hindu communalism, and gave their support to a compromise plan : "As for the possible unfavourable repercussions of enlarging the present State of Punjab on the existing communal equilibrium, the position is that the proposal which we make about this region will no doubt result in the formation of a larger unit, but the Sikh percentage in the enlarged unit will not be adversely affected as compared with their percentage in the existing State of Punjab. The Sikh percentage in the proposed State will in fact show a small improvement of a little more than 1.5 per cent, resulting in a corresponding decrease in the Hindu percentage."[32] It is ironical that the S. R. C. proposal makes an appeal to the same communal sentiments which it so loudly deprecates.

It was the Shiromani Akali Dal, the organization of orthodox Sikhs, which sponsored the idea of a Punjabi-speaking State. The reasons which prompted it to do so are not difficult to guess. In a recent speech, Sardar Gyani Singh Rarewala, formerly Chief Minister of Pepsu, stated that the Sikhs were suffering from frustration ever since Independence because of the denial of "due status to Punjabi language and Gurmukhi script," discrimination against Sikh Scheduled Castes, and discrimination against the Sikhs in government service both in appointments as well as promotions.[33]

The Congress Government have evolved a "regional formula" to set at rest Sikh apprehensions of domination by Hindus. This solution has been opposed by the Hindus. The *Times of India* reported that at an emergency meeting of the Maha Punjab Samiti Working Committee held on September 5, 1956, a resolution was passed declaring that the "unpatriotic regional formula for the Punjab was intolerable and would have to be resisted by measures sterner in nature than those adopted by the Samiti previously."[34]

I have nearly come to the end of my sketchy survey of the role which caste is playing in modern India. There is one important

[32] *Ibid*, p. 153, S. 568; pp. 148-9, S. 550.

[33] The *Hindu*, June 11, 1956.

[34] The *Times of India*, September 7, 1956.

matter, however, to which I must make a reference, necessarily inadequate, before I conclude. Under the Constitution, the practice of Untouchability in any form is forbidden. Enforcement of any disability arising out of Untouchability shall be an offence punishable according to law (Article 17 of the Constitution). Articles 15, 25, 29 (2), 38, and 46 deal with both the positive and negative aspects of Untouchability, i. e., preventing all forms of discrimination against any group of people as well as the adoption of positive measures to put an end to Untouchability, and to help promote the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and in particular, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

The Constitution grants statutory protection to the Scheduled Castes, and there are specific provisions which guarantee protection in various contexts. Thus there is reservation of seats for the Scheduled Castes in the Lok Sabha and in the State Legislative Assemblies. Out of 495 seats in the Lok Sabha, 72 seats have been reserved for the Scheduled Castes. In the State Legislative Assemblies, against a total number of 3,283 seats in all States, 477 seats have been reserved for the Schedules Castes.

The Constitution has also provided for the reservation of appointments for the Scheduled Castes in the services of the Union and State Governments. Under Article 35, the claims of the members of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are taken into consideration, consistently with the maintenance of the efficiency of administration, in making appointments to services and posts in the Union and State Governments. Twelve and a half per cent of the vacancies filled by open competitive examinations in the Central and All-India Services are reserved for members of the Scheduled Castes. The reservation is increased to 16⅔ per cent in the case of posts and services filled otherwise than by open competition on an all-India basis. Besides the above, the various State Governments have also made some efforts to improve the economic, educational, and social conditions of the Scheduled Castes. Some of them have resorted to legislation to give special protection to the Scheduled Castes.[35]

The conscience of enlightened Indians demands that Untouchability be abolished, and that everything that is possible be done to bring the Scheduled Castes and Tribes and the various other groups

[35] *Report of the Seminar on Casteism and Removal of Untouchability*, Bombay 1955, pp. 98-100.

subsumed under the blanket term of Backward Classes, to the level of the so-called advanced groups. But it is beginning to be realized increasingly that the measures devised to bring about social and economic equality might themselves perpetuate the evil system of caste. In fact, this question was raised in a pointed manner by Pandit Pant in his concluding address to the Seminar on Casteism and the Removal of Untouchability.[36] It is understandable that groups which are classed as "backward" show reluctance to give up the privileges of "backwardness."

As I write these lines, a news item in the *Times of India* (September 5, 1956) reports that the Government of India has found the report of the Backward Classes Commission vague and inadequate, as it has failed to establish objective and acceptable criteria for defining "backwardness." The Commission was appointed in 1953 under Article 340 of the Constitution, with Shri Kaka Kalelkar as Chairman. Its terms of reference were to determine the criteria to be adopted in considering whether any sections of the people—in addition to those listed as Scheduled Castes and Tribes—should be treated as socially and educationally backward, to prepare a list of such groups, and to recommend ways and means of assisting them and improving their condition.

The Commission's list contains as many as 2,399 groups, of which 913 alone account for an estimated population of 116 millions, while the Scheduled Castes and Tribes will make up another 70 millions. All women have been regarded as "backward," though they are not listed among the Backward Classes, since they cannot be regarded as a separate community.

According to the Commission, then, about three fourths of the country's population would be "backward." It is difficult to see how special privileges could be given to such a large section of the population, and this is clearly recognized in the Government's Memorandum on the Commission's Report.

A majority of the members of the Commission were of the opinion that caste determined the degree and extent of backwardness. The Government of India did not accept this view, but it admitted that the caste system is the greatest hindrance to progress towards an egalitarian society. It added the warning that the recognition of the specified castes as backward may serve to maintain and even perpetuate the existing distinctions on the basis of caste.

[36] *Ibid*, p. 152.

It is time, then, to give serious thought towards evolving "neutral" indices of backwardness, indices which also include the Scheduled Tribes and Castes. The criteria of literacy, landownership, and income in cash or grain, should be able to subsume all cases of backwardness. This is admittedly a huge and difficult task but not impossible. And the end may make it worth while.

One last point. Caste is so tacitly and so completely accepted by all, including those who are most vocal in condemning it, that it is everywhere the unit of social action. Some caste conferences have been urged by their leaders "to seize the opportunities afforded under the Five-Year Plan to the fullest advantage and contribute their share to the industrial development [of the country]."[37] Shri S. Chenniah, President of the Mysore Pradesh Congress Committee, was giving expression to a widespread sentiment when he stated in an address to the conference of a particular caste in Nanjanagud in October 1955 that "communal bodies striving for economic and social uplift cannot be dubbed as harmful. Human psychology being what it is, it often was the communal bond which urged them to action." He expressed his pleasure at his having won the confidence of the members of the caste in question. He pointed out that the hostel which had been built for students of that caste had now been thrown open to students of all castes. He held out the assurance that when candidates were selected for the next general election (1957), the claims of the members of that caste would receive due attentions. But even Shri Chenniah argued that there must be a limit to caste organizations.

Commenting on the above Report, the *Times of India* remarked in a leader (October 23, 1955): "The politician who wants that caste and communal distinctions should disappear is at the same time aware of its vote-catching power, and is thus faced with a real dilemma. Where should he draw the line when he is asked to extend help and patronage to communal organizations? Should a Union Minister grace by his presence a function arranged by a sub-caste among Marathas? Could a newly-elected Congress President allow himself to be garlanded by caste fraternities?" The leader concluded by saying: "The first step towards solving the dilemma facing the politician is to recognize its (caste's) widespread incidence and implications." It is, however, only the first step.

[37] Silver Jubilee of the Nadar Mahajana Sangam at Virudhanagar. See the *Hindu*, May 29, 1956.

2. A NOTE ON SANSKRITIZATION AND WESTERNIZATION

The concept of "Sanskritization" was found useful by me in the analysis of the social and religious life of the Coorgs of South India. A few other anthropologists who are making studies of tribal and village communities in various parts of India seem to find the concept helpful in the analysis of their material, and this fact induces me to attempt a re-examination of it here.

The first use of the term Sanskritization in this sense occurs in my book, *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India* (Oxford, 1952, p. 30):

> "The caste system is far from a rigid system in which the position of each component caste is fixed for all time. Movement has always been possible, and especially so in the middle regions of the hierarchy. A low caste was able, in a generation or two, to rise to a higher position in the hierarchy by adopting vegetarianism and teetotalism, and by Sanskritizing its ritual and pantheon. In short, it took over, as far as possible, the customs, rites, and beliefs of the Brahmins, and the adoption of the Brahminic way of life by a low caste seems to have been frequent, though theoretically forbidden. This process has been called 'Sanskritization' in this book, in preference to 'Brahminization,' as certain Vedic rites are confined to the Brahmins and the two other 'twice-born' castes."

Sanskritization is no doubt an awkward term, but it was preferred to Brahminization for several reasons: Brahminization is subsumed in the wider process of Sanskritization though at some points Brahminization and Sanskritization are at variance with each other. For instance, the Brahmins of the Vedic period drank *soma*, an alcoholic drink,[1] ate beef, and offered blood sacrifices. Both were given up in post-Vedic times. It has been suggested that this was the result of Jain and Buddhist influence. Today, Brahmins are, by and large, vegetarians; only the Saraswat, Kashmiri, and Bengali Brahmins eat non-vegetarian food. All these

[1] See "Soma" in the *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. XI, pp. 685-6.

Brahmins are, however, traditionally teetotallers. In brief, the customs and habits of the Brahmins changed after they had settled in India. Had the term Brahminization been used, it would have been necessary to specify which particular Brahmin group was meant, and at which period of its recorded history.

Again, the agents of Sanskritization were (and are) not always Brahmins. In fact, the non-twice-born castes were prohibited from following the customs and rites of the Brahmins, and it is not unreasonable to suppose that Brahmins were responsible for this prohibition as they were a privileged group entrusted with the authority to declare the laws. But the existence of such a prohibition did not prevent the Sanskritization of the customs and rites of the lower castes. The Lingayats of South India have been a powerful force for the Sanskritization of the customs and rites of several low castes of Karnatak. The Lingayat movement was founded by a Brahmin named Basava in the twelfth century, and another Brahmin, Ekantada Ramayya, played an important part in it. But it was a popular movement in the true sense of the term, attracting followers from all castes, especially the low castes, and it was anti-Brahminical in tone and spirit.[2] The Lingayats of Mysore claim equality with Brahmins, and the more orthodox Lingayats do not eat food cooked or handled by Brahmins.

The Smiths of South India are another interesting example: they call themselves Vishwakarma Brahmins, wear the sacred thread and have Sanskritized their ritual. But some of them still eat meat and drink alcoholic liquor. This does not, however, explain why they are considered to belong to the Left-hand division of the castes, and no caste belonging to the Right-hand division, including the Holeyas (Untouchables), will eat food or drink water touched by them. Until recently they suffered from a number of disabilities: they were allowed to celebrate their weddings only in villages in which there was a temple to their caste-deity Kali. Their wedding procession was not allowed to go along streets in which the Right-hand castes lived. And there were also other disabilities. Normally Sanskritization enables a caste to obtain a higher position in the hierarchy. But in the case of the Smiths it seems to have resulted only in their drawing upon themselves the wrath of all the other castes. The reasons for this are not known.

[2] See E. Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, Madras, 1909, Vol. V, pp. 237ff; see also *Encyclopaedia Brittanica*, 14th ed., Vol. XIV, p. 162.

The usefulness of Sanskritization as a tool in the analysis of Indian society is greatly limited by the complexity of the concept as well as its looseness. An attempt will be made here to analyze further the conceptual whole which is Sanskritization.

II

The structural basis of Hindu society is caste, and it is not possible to understand Sanskritization without reference to the structural framework in which it occurs. Speaking generally, the castes occupying the top positions in the hierarchy are more Sanskritized than castes in the lower and middle regions of the hierarchy and this has been responsible for the Sanskritization of the lower castes as well as the outlying tribes. The lower castes always seem to have tried to take over the customs and way of life of the higher castes. The theoretical existence of a ban on their adoption of Brahminical customs and rites was not very effective, and this is clear when we consider the fact that many non-Brahminical castes practise many Brahminical customs and rites. A more effective barrier to to the lower castes' taking over of the customs and rites of the higher castes was the hostile attitude of the locally dominant caste, or of the king of the region. In their case there was physical force which could be used to keep the lower groups in check.

The point which is really interesting to note is that in spite of the existence of certain obstacles, Brahminical customs and way of life did manage to spread not only among all Hindus but also among some outlying tribes. This is to some extent due to the fact that Hindu society is a stratified one, in which there are innumerable small groups each of which tries to pass for a higher group. And the best way of staking a claim to a higher position is to adopt the customs and way of life of a higher caste. As this process was common to all the castes except the highest, it meant that the Brahminical customs and way of life spread among all Hindus. It is possible that the very ban on the lower castes' adoption of the Brahminical way of life had an exactly opposite effect.

Though, over a long period of time, Brahminical rites and customs spread among the lower castes, in the short run the locally dominant caste was imitated by the rest. And the locally dominant caste was frequently not Brahmin. It could be said that in the case of the numerous castes occupying the lowest levels, Brahminical customs

reached them in a chain reaction. That is, each group took from the one higher to it, and in turn gave to the group below. Sometimes, however, as in the case of the Smiths of South India, a caste tried to jump over all its structural neighbours, and claimed equality with the Brahmins. The hostility which the Smiths have attracted is perhaps due to their collective social megalomania.

Occasionally we find castes which enjoyed political and economic power but were not rated high in ritual ranking. That is, there was a hiatus between their ritual and politico-economic positions. In such cases Sanskritization occurred sooner or later, because without it the claim to a higher position was not fully effective. The three main axes of power in the caste system are the ritual, the economic, and the political ones, and the possession of power in any one sphere usually leads to the acquisition of power in the other two. This does not mean, however, that inconsistencies do not occur—occasionally, a wealthy caste has a low ritual position, and contrariwise, a caste having a high ritual position is poor.

III

The idea of hierarchy is omnipresent in the caste system; not only do the various castes form a hierarchy, but the occupations practised by them, the various items of their diet, and the customs they observe all form separate hierarchies. Thus, practising an occupation such as butchery, tanning, herding swine or handling toddy, puts a caste in a low position. Eating pork or beef is more defiling than eating fish or mutton. Castes which offer blood-sacrifices to deities are lower than castes making only offerings of fruit and flower. The entire way of life of the top castes seeps down the hierarchy. And as mentioned earlier, the language, cooking, clothing, jewellery, and way of life of the Brahmins spreads eventually to the entire society.

Two "legal fictions" seem to have helped the spread of Sanskritization among the low castes. Firstly, the ban against the non-twice-born castes' performance of Vedic ritual was circumvented by restricting the ban only to the chanting of *mantras* from the Vedas. That is, the ritual acts were separated from the accompanying *mantras* and this separation facilitated the spread of Brahminic ritual among all Hindu castes, frequently including Untouchables. Thus several Vedic rites, including the rite of the gift of the virgin

(*kanyadan*), are performed at the marriage of many non-Brahminical castes in Mysore State. And secondly, a Brahmin priest officiates at these weddings. He does not chant Vedic *mantras*, however, but instead, the *mangalashtaka stotras* which are post-Vedic verses in Sanskrit. The substitution of these verses for Vedic *mantras* is the second "legal fiction."

IV

The non-Brahminical castes adopt not only Brahminical ritual, but also certain Brahminical institutions and values. I shall illustrate what I mean by reference to marriage, women, and kinship. I should add here that throughout this essay I have drawn on my experience of conditions in Mysore State, except when I have stated otherwise.

Until recently, Brahmins used to marry their girls before puberty, and parents who had not succeeded in finding husbands for daughters past the age of puberty were regarded as guilty of a great sin. Brahmin marriage is in theory indissoluble, and a Brahmin widow, even if she be a child widow, is required to shave her head, shed all jewellery and ostentation in clothes. She was (and still is, to some extent) regarded as inauspicious. Sex life is denied her. Among Hindus generally, there is a preference for virginity in brides, chastity in wives, and continence in widows, and this is specially marked among the highest castes.

The institutions of the "low" castes are more liberal in the spheres of marriage and sex than those of the Brahmins. Post-puberty marriages do occur among them, widows do not have to shave their heads, and divorce and widow marriage are both permitted and practised. In general, their sex code is not as harsh towards women as that of the top castes, especially Brahmins. But as a caste rises in the hierarchy and its ways become more Sanskritized, it adopts the sex and marriage code of the Brahmins. Sanskritization results in harshness towards women.

Sanskritization has significant effects on conjugal relations. Among Brahmins for instance, a wife is enjoined to treat her husband as a deity. It is very unusual for a wife to take her meal before the husband has his, and in orthodox families, the wife still eats on the dining leaf on which her husband has eaten. Normally, such a leaf may not be touched as it would render impure the hand touching

it. Usually the woman who removes the dining leaf purifies the spot where the leaf had rested with a solution of cowdung, after which she washes her hands. There is no pollution, however, in eating on the leaf on which the husband has eaten.

Orthodox Brahmin women perform a number of *vratas* or religious vows, the aim of some of which is to secure a long life for the husband. A woman's hope is to predecease her husband and thus avoid becoming a widow. Women who predecease their husbands are considered lucky as well as good, while widowhood is attributed to sins committed in a previous incarnation. A wife who shows utter devotion to her husband is held up as an ideal, as a *pativrata*, i.e, one who regards the devoted service of her husband as her greatest duty. There are myths describing the devotion and loyalty of some sainted women to their husbands. These women are reverenced on certain occasions.

While polygyny is permitted, monogamy is held up as an ideal. Rama, the hero of the epic *Ramayana*, is dedicated to the ideal of having only one wife (*ekapatnivrata*). The conjugal state is regarded as a holy state, and the husband and wife must perform several rites together. A bachelor has a lower religious status than a married man, and is not allowed to perform certain important rites such as offering *pinda* or balls of cooked rice to the manes. Marriage is a religious duty. When bathing in the Ganges or other sacred river, the husband and wife have the ends of their garments tied together. A wife is entitled to half the religious merit earned by her husband by fasting, prayer, and penance.

In the sphere of kinship, Sanskritization stresses the importance of the *vamsha*, which is the patrilineal lineage of the Brahmins. The dead ancestors are apotheosized, and offerings of food and drink have to be made to them periodically by their male descendants. Absence of these offerings will confine the manes to a hell called *put*. The Sanskrit word for son is *putra*, which by folk etymology is considered to mean one who frees the manes from the hell called *put*.[3] In short, Sanskritization results in increasing the importance of having sons by making them a religious necessity. At the same

[3] See M. Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 2nd edition, Oxford, 1899, p. 632: "*put* or *pud* (a word invented to explain *putra* or *put-tra*, see Mn. ix, 138, and cf. Nir. ii, 11) hell or a partic. hell (to which the childless are condemned)"; and "*putra*, m. (etym. doubtful. . .traditionally said to be a comp. *put-tra* 'preserving from the hell called Put,' Mn. ix, 138) a son, child. . ."

time it has the effect of lowering the value of daughters because, as said earlier, parents are required to get them married before they come of age to a suitable man from the same subcaste. It is often difficult to find such a man, and in recent years, the difficulty has increased enormously owing to the institution of dowry.

Among the non-Brahmins of Mysore, however, though a son is preferred, a daughter is not unwelcome. Actually, girls are in demand among them. And there is no religious duty to get a girl married before puberty. The code under which a woman has to live is not as harsh among them as among the Brahmins. The non-Brahmins are also patrilineal, and the patrilineal lineage is well developed among them. The dead ancestors are occasionally offered food and drink. But it could be said that in the lineage of the non-Brahmins the religious element is less prominent than among the Brahmins.

V

Sanskritization means not only the adoption of new customs and habits, but also exposure to new ideas and values which have found frequent expression in the vast body of Sanskrit literature, sacred as well as secular. *Karma*, *dharma*, *papa*, *maya*, *samsara* and *moksha* are examples of some of the most common Sanskritic theological ideas, and when a people become Sanskritized these words occur frequently in their talk. These ideas reach the common people through Sanskritic myths and stories. The institution of *harikatha* helps in spreading Sanskrit stories and ideas among the illiterate. In a *harikatha* the priest reads and explains a religious story to his audience. Each story takes a few weeks to complete, the audience meeting for a few hours every evening in a temple. *Harikathas* may be held at any time, but festivals such as Dasara, Ramanavami, Shivaratri, and Ganesh Chaturthi are considered especially suitable for listening to *harikathas*. The faithful believe that such listening leads to the acquisition of spiritual merit. It is one of the traditionally approved ways of spending one's time.

The spread of Sanskrit theological ideas increased under British rule. The development of communications carried Sanskritization to areas previously inaccessible, and the spread of literacy carried it to groups very low in the caste hierarchy. Western technology—railways, the internal combustion engine, press, radio, and plane—

has aided the spread of Sanskritization. For instance, the popularity of *harikatha* has increased in the last few years in Mysore City, the narrator usually using a microphone to reach a much larger audience than before. Indian films are popularizing stories and incidents borrowed from the epics and *puranas*. Films have been made about the lives of saints such as Nandanar, Potana, Tukaram, Chaitanya, Mira, Thyagaraja and Tulasidas. Cheap and popular editions of the epics, *puranas*, and other religious and semi-religious books in the various vernaculars are available nowadays.

The introduction by the British of a Western political institution like parliamentary democracy has also contributed to the increased Sanskritization of the country. Prohibition, a Sanskritic value has been written into the Constitution of the Republic of India, and the Congress Governments in all the States have introduced it wholly or partly in their respective areas.

In Mysore State, the local Congress party is busy conducting a campaign against offering blood-sacrifices to village deities. The Congress in the South is dominated by non-Brahminical castes, the vast majority of whom periodically sacrifice animals to their deities. In spite of this, the leaders of the Congress are advocating the substitution of offerings of fruit and flower for animals. This is again a triumph for Sanskritic, though post-Vedic, values against the values of the bulk of the population.

So far, I have mentioned only the ways in which the Westernization of a group has helped its Sanskritization. In another sense, however, there is a conflict between Sanskritic and Western values. For instance there appears to be a conflict between the world-view disclosed by the systematic application of scientific method to the various spheres of knowledge and the world-view of the traditional religions.

No analysis of modern Indian social life would be complete without a consideration of Westernization and the interaction between it and Sanskritization. In the nineteenth century, the British found in India institutions such as slavery, human sacrifice, suttee, thuggery, and in certain parts of the country, female infanticide. They used all the power at their disposal to fight these institutions which they considered barbarous. There were also many other institutions which they did not approve of, but which, for various reasons, they did not try to abolish directly.

The fact that the country was overrun by aliens who looked down upon many features of the life of the natives, some of which they regarded as plainly barbarous, threw the Indian leaders on the defensive. Reformist movements such as the Brahmo Samaj were aimed at ridding Hinduism of its numerous "evils."[4] The present was so bleak that the past became golden. The Arya Samaj, another reformist movement within Hinduism, emphasized a wish to return to Vedic Hinduism, which was unlike contemporary Hinduism. The discovery of Sanskrit by Western scholars, and the systematic piecing together of India's past by Western or Western-inspired scholarship, gave Indians a much-needed confidence in their relations with the West. Tributes to the greatness of ancient Indian culture by Western scholars such as Max Muller were gratefully received by Indian leaders (see, for instance, appendices to Mahatma Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj*).[5] It was not uncommon for educated Indians to make extravagant claims for their own culture, and to run down the West as materialistic and unspiritual.

The caste and class from which Indian leaders came were also relevant in this connection. The upper castes had a literary tradition and were opposed to blood-sacrifices, but in certain other customs and habits they were further removed from the British than the lower castes. The latter ate meat, some of them ate even pork and beef, and drank alcoholic liquor; women enjoyed greater freedom among them; and divorce and widow marriage were not prohibited. The Indian leaders were thus caught in a dilemma. They found that certain customs and habits which until then they had looked down upon obtained also among their masters. The British who ate beef and pork and drank liquor, possessed political and economic power, a new technology, scientific knowledge, and a great literature. The Westernized upper castes began acquiring customs and habits which were not dissimilar from those they had looked down upon. Another result was that the evils of upper caste Hindu society came to be regarded as evils of the entire society.

The form and pace of Westernization of India too varied from one region to another, and from one section of the population to

[4] See "Brahmo Samaj" in the *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. II, pp. 813-4.

[5] Ahmedabad, 1946. See the Appendices which contain "testimonies by eminent men" to the greatness of Indian culture. Among the eminent men are Max Muller, J. Seymour Keay, M. P., Victor Cousin, Col. Thomas Munro and the Abee Dubois.

another. For instance, one group of people became Westernized in their dress, diet, manners, speech, sports, and in the gadgets they used, while another absorbed Western science, knowledge, and literature remaining relatively free from Westernization in externals. It is clear that such a distinction cannot be a hard and fast one, but one of relative emphasis. It has to be made, however, in order to distinguish different types of Westernization which obtained among the different groups in the country.

In Mysore State, for instance, the Brahmins led the other castes in Westernization. This was only natural as the Brahmins possessed a literary tradition, and, in addition, many of them stood at the top of the rural economic hierarchy as landowners. (Formerly, it was customary to give land to Brahmins as an act of charity. Distinguished Brahmin administrators were also given gifts of land.) They were the first to sense the arrival of new opportunities following the establishment of British rule, and left their natal villages for cities such as Bangalore and Mysore in order to obtain the benefit of English education, an indispensable passport to employment under the new dispensation.

Though the scholarly tradition of the Brahmins placed them in a favourable position for obtaining the new knowledge, in certain other matters they were the most handicapped in the race for Westernization. This was especially so in the South where the large majority of them were vegetarians and abstained from alcoholic liquor. Also, the fear of being polluted prevented them from eating cooked food touched by others, and from taking up occupations considered defiling. To orthodox Brahmins the Englishman who ate pork and beef, drank whisky, and smoked a pipe, was the living embodiment of ritual impurity. On the other hand, the Englishman had political and economic power, for which he was feared, admired, respected, and disliked.

The net result of the Westernization of the Brahmins was that they interposed themselves between the British and the rest of the native population. The result was a new and secular caste system super-imposed on the traditional system, in which the British, the New Kshatriyas, stood at the top, while the Brahmins occupied the second position, and the others stood at the base of the pyramid. The Brahmins looked up to the British, and the rest of the people looked up to both the Brahmins and the British. The fact that some of the values and customs of the British were opposed to some

Brahminical values made the situation confusing. However, such a contradiction has always been implicit, though not in such a pronounced manner, in the caste system. Kshatriya and Brahminical values have always been opposed to some extent, and in spite of the theoretical superiority of the Brahmin to all the other castes, the Kshatriya, by virtue of the political (and through it the economic) power at his disposal, has throughout exercised a dominant position. The super-imposition of the British on the caste system only sharpened the contrast.

The position of the Brahmin in the new hierarchy was crucial. He became the filter through which Westernization reached the rest of Hindu society in Mysore. This probably helped Westernization as the other castes were used to imitating the ways of the Brahmins. But while the Westernization of the Brahmins enabled the entire Hindu society to Westernize, the Brahmins themselves found some aspects of Westernization, such as the British diet, dress, and freedom from pollution, difficult to accept. (Perhaps another caste should not have found them so difficult. The Coorgs, for instance, took quite easily to British diet and dress, and certain activities like dancing, hunting and sports.)

The Brahmins of Mysore are divided into *vaidikas* or priests, and *laukikas* or the laity, and a similar distinction seems to obtain among the Brahmins in other parts of India. It is only the *vidikas* who follow the priestly vocation while the *laukikas* follow other and secular occupations. Ritually, the priests are higher than the laity, but the fact that the latter frequently enjoyed economic and political power gave them a superior position in secular contexts. British rule widened further the gulf between the two, for it provided the laity with numerous opportunities to acquire wealth and power. And one of the long-term effects of British rule was to increase the secularization of Indian life. The secularization as well as the widening of the economic horizon pushed the priests into a lower position than before. Also traditional Sanskrit learning did not have either the prestige, or yield the dividends, which Western education did. The priests began by being aggressive towards the Westernized laity, but gradually, as the numbers of the latter increased, they were thrown more and more on the defensive. Worse was to follow when the priests themselves started becoming Westernized. They wanted electric lights, radios, and water taps in their houses. They began riding cycles. The leather seat of the cycle

was considered defiling, and so it was at first covered with the pure and sacred deerskin. In course of time the deerskin was discarded and the "naked" leather seat was used. Tap water was objected to at first as the water had to pass through a leather washer, but in time even this objection was set aside. Finally, the priests started sending their sons to Western-type schools, and this frequently meant that there was none in the family to continue the father's occupation.

There is, however, another tendency in modern India which is buttressing the position and authority of the priests. Educated and Westernized Indians are showing some interest in Sanskrit and in ancient Indian culture, and in the country at large, politicians are frequently heard stressing the importance of Sanskritic learning. Pandit Nehru's *Discovery of India* has started many a young man on a similar journey into the country's past. Also, many Westerners have suddenly begun discovering new virtues in India, Indians, and Indian culture, and this has resulted in more Indians wanting to seek a better acquaintance with their culture.

The Westernization of the Brahmins of Mysore brought about a number of changes in their life. There was a change in their appearance and dress. The tuft gave way to cropped hair and the traditional dress gave place, at least partially, to Western-type dress and shoes. The change in dress marked a gradual weakening of ideas regarding ritual purity. For instance, formerly, eating was a ritual act, and a Brahmin had to wear ritually pure robes while eating or serving a meal. This meant wearing either a freshly-washed cotton dhoti, or a silk dhoti, and a pure upper cloth. Wearing a shirt was taboo. But as Western clothes became more popular Brahmin men sat to dinner with their shirts on. And today, dining at a table is becoming common among the rich.

Formerly, the morning meal was offered to the domestic deity before being served to the members of the family, and all the male members who had donned the sacred thread performed a few ritual acts before beginning the meal. Nowadays, however, many Brahmins have discarded the sacred thread, though the *upanayana* ceremony at which the thread is donned still continues to be performed. And it is only at formal dinners where the orthodox are present that certain ritual acts are performed before eating. Where people eat at a table, purification with a solution of cowdung is no longer done.

The Brahmin dietary has been enlarged to include certain vegetables which were formerly forbidden, such as onion, potato, carrot, radish, and beetroot. Many eat raw eggs for health reasons and consume medicines which they know to be made from various organs of animals. But meat-eating is even now rare, while the consumption of Western alcoholic liquor is not as rare. Cigarettes are common among the educated.

The Brahmins have also taken to new occupations. Even in the thirties, the Brahmins showed a reluctance to take up trade or any occupation involving manual work. But they were driven by the prevalent economic depression to take up new jobs, and World War II completed this process. Many Brahmins enlisted themselves in the army and this effected a great change in their habits and outlook. Before World War II, young men who wanted to go to Bombay, Calcutta, or Delhi in search of jobs had to be prepared for the opposition of their elders. But the postwar years found young men not only in all parts of India, but outside too. There was a sudden expansion in the geographical and social space of the Brahmins. Formerly, Brahmins objected to becoming doctors as the profession involved handling men from all castes, including Untouchables, and corpses. This is now a thing of the past. A few educated Brahmins now own farms where they raise poultry. One of them even wants to have a piggery.

Over seventy years ago, the institution of brideprice seems to have prevailed among some sections of Mysore Brahmins. But with Westernization, and the demand it created for educated boys who had good jobs, dowry became popular. The better educated a boy, the larger the dowry his parents demanded for him. The age at which girls married shot up. Over twenty-five years ago it was customary for Brahmins to marry their girls before puberty. Nowadays, urban and middle class Brahmins are rarely able to get their girls married before they are eighteen, and there are many girls above twenty who are unmarried. Child widows are rare, and shaving the heads of widows is practically a thing of the past.

There has been a general secularization of Hindu life in the last one hundred and fifty years, and this has especially affected the Brahmins whose life was permeated with ritual. The life of no other caste among Hindus was equally ritualized. One of the many interesting contradictions of modern Hindu social life is that while the Brahmins are becoming more and more Westernized, the other

castes are becoming more and more Sanskritized. In the lower reaches of the hierarchy, castes are taking up customs which the Brahmins are busy discarding. As far as these castes are concerned, it looks as though Sanskritization is an essential preliminary to Westernization.

To describe the social changes occurring in modern India in terms of Sanskritization and Westernization is to describe it primarily in cultural and not structural terms. An analysis in terms of structure is much more difficult than an analysis in terms of culture. The increase in the social space of the Brahmins, and its implications for them and for the caste system as a whole, need to be studied in detail. The consequences of the existence of the dual, and occasionally conflicting, pressures of Sanskritization and Westernization provide an interesting field for systematic sociological analysis.

A Note to the Above[6]

The British conquest of India set free a number of forces; political, economic, social, and technological. These forces affected this country's social and cultural life profoundly and at every point. The withdrawal of the British from India not only did not mean the cessation of these forces but, meant, on the contrary, their intensification. For instance, the economic revolution which the British began with the gradual introduction of a new technology under a capitalist and *laissez-faire* ideology has given place to a vast and planned effort to develop the country as quickly as possible under a socialist and democratic ideology. The idea of Five-Year Plans may be described as the culmination of the slow and unplanned attempts of the British to transform the country industrially and economically. The political integration which the British began is also being carried further, though here the division of the country into the two States of India and Pakistan is a step away from the integration of the subcontinent. But this does not mean that forces

[6] It is nearly a year since the preceding essay was written, and in the meantime I have given some more thought to the subject. The result is the present Note in which I have made a few additional observations of the twin processes of Sanskritization and Westernization. In this connection I must thank Dr. F. G. Bailey of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, for taking the trouble to criticize my paper in detail in his letters to me. I must also thank Dr. McKim Marriott of the University of Chicago, and the delegates to the Conference of Anthropologists and Sociologists held at Madras on October 5-7, 1955, for criticisms which followed the reading of the paper.

inherent in Indian society have been destroyed by the British impact; they have only undergone modification and, in some cases, have been even strengthened. Pre-British economy was a stationary one in which money was relatively scarce, and barter obtained extensively in the rural areas. Relations between individuals were unspecialized, multiplex, and largely determined by status. The British gradually brought in a growing and monetary economy, participation in which was not banned to any group or individual on the ground of birth in a particular caste. For instance, the abolition of slavery by the British enabled the Untouchable castes in Coorg to desert their Coorg masters and to work as labourers on the coffee plantations started by Europeans.[7] But for the emancipating legislation they could not have participated in the new economy. This should serve to remind us that British rule also brought in a new set of values and a new worldview.

I have elsewhere tried to argue[8] that the traditional and pre-British caste system permitted a certain amount of group mobility. Only the extremities of the system were relatively fixed while there was movement in between. This was made possible by a certain vagueness regarding mutual rank which obtained in the middle regions of the caste hierarchy. Vagueness as to mutual rank is of the essence of the caste system in operation as distinct from the system in popular conception.[9] And mobility increased a great deal after the advent of the British. Groups which in the pre-British days had no chance of aspiring to anything more than a bare subsistence came by opportunities for making money, and having made money, they wanted to stake a claim for higher status. Some of them did achieve higher status. The social circulation which was sluggish in pre-British times speeded up considerably in the British period. But the change was only a quantitative one.

Economic betterment thus seems to lead to the Sanskritization of the customs and way of life of a group. Sometimes a group may start by acquiring political power and this may lead to economic betterment and Sanskritization. This does not mean, however, that economic betterment must necessarily lead to Sanskritization. What is important is the collective desire to rise high in the esteem of friends, neighbours and rivals, and this should be followed by the

[7] See *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India*, p. 19.

[8] See Chapter 3, "*Varna* and Caste", in this book.

[9] *Ibid.*

adoption of methods by which the status of a group is raised. It is a fact that such a desire is usually preceded by the acquisition of wealth; I am unable, however, to assert that economic betterment is a necessary precondition to Sanskritization. For instance, the Untouchables of Rampura village in Mysore State are getting increasingly Sanskritized and this seems to be due to their present leadership and to the fact that the younger men are more in contact with the outside world than their parents. Also, if the reports which one hears from some local men are to be believed, Rampura Untouchables are being egged on by Untouchable leaders from outside to change their way of life. Whether the economic position of Untouchables has improved during the last seventy years or so is not easy to determine, though it is likely that they also have benefited from the greater all-round prosperity which resulted when the area under irrigation increased nearly eighty years ago. In brief, while we have no evidence to assert that all cases of Sanskritization are preceded by the acquisition of wealth, the available evidence is not definite enough to state that Sanskritization can occur without any reference whatever to the economic betterment of a group. Economic betterment, the acquisition of political power, education, leadership, and a desire to move up in the hierarchy, are all relevant factors in Sanskritization, and each case of Sanskritization may show all or some of these factors mixed up in different measures.

It is necessary, however, to stress that Sanskritization does not automatically result in the achievement of a higher status for the group. The group concerned must clearly put forward a claim to belong to a particular *varna*, Vaishya, Kshatriya, or Brahmin. They must alter their customs, diet, and way of life suitably, and if there are any inconsistencies in their claim, they must try to "explain" them by inventing an appropriate myth. In addition, the group must be content to wait an indefinite period, and during this period it must maintain a continuous pressure regarding its claims. A generation or two must pass usually before a claim begins to be accepted; this is due to the fact that the people who first hear the claim know that the caste in question is trying to pass for something other than what it really is, and the claim has a better chance with their children and grandchildren. In certain cases, a caste or tribal group may make a claim for a long time without it being accepted. I have in view only acceptance by other castes and I am not considering individual sceptics who will always be there.

It is even possible that a caste may overreach itself in making claims, with the result that instead of moving up it may incur the disapproval of the others. It is also not unlikely that a claim which may succeed in a particular area or period of time will not succeed in another. A developed historical sense would be inimical to such claims but it is as yet not forthcoming among our people.

Group mobility is a characteristic of the caste system, whereas in a class system it is the individual and his family which moves up or down. One of the implications of group mobility is that either the group is large enough to constitute an endogamous unit by itself, or it recruits girls in marriage from the original group while it does not give girls in return. This implies that the original group is impressed by the fact that the splinter group is superior to it for otherwise it would not consent to such a one-sided and inferior role. A larger number of people are needed in North India than in the South to constitute an endogamous group, for marriage with near kin is prohibited in the North, and there is in addition an insistence on village exogamy. In the South, on the other hand, cross-cousin and uncle-niece marriages are preferred, and the village is not an exogamous unit. But I am straying from my main theme : what I wish to stress here is that Sanskritization is a source of fission in the caste system, and does occasionally bring about hypergamous relations between the splinter group and the original caste from which it has fissioned off. It both precedes as well as sets the seal on social mobility. It thereby brings the caste system of any region closer to the existing politico-economic situation. But for it the caste system would have been subjected to great strain. It has provided a traditional medium of expression for change within that system, and the medium has held good in spite of the vast increase in the quantum of change which has occurred in British and post-British India. It has canalized the change in such a way that all-India values are asserted and the homogeneity of the entire Hindu society increases. The continued Sanskritization of castes will probably mean the eventual introduction of major cultural and structural changes in Hindu society as a whole. But Sanskritization does not always result in higher status for the Sanskritized caste, and this is clearly exemplified by the Untouchables. However thoroughgoing the Sanskritization of an Untouchable group may be, it is unable to cross the barrier of untouchability. It is indeed an anachronism that while groups which were originally outside

Hinduism such as tribal groups or alien ethnic groups have succeeded in entering the Hindu fold, and occasionally at a high level, an Untouchable caste is always forced to remain Untouchable. Their only chance of moving up is to go so far away from their natal village that nothing is known about them in the new area. But spatial mobility was very difficult in pre-British India : it meant losing such security as they had and probably going into an enemy chiefdom and facing all the dangers there. Movement was near impossible when we remember that Untouchables were generally attached as agrestic serfs to caste Hindu landlords.[10]

The fact that Sanskritization does not help the Untouchables to move up does not, however, make Sanskritization any the less popular. All over India there are discernible movements more or less strong, among Untouchables, to discard the consumption of carcass beef, domestic pork, and toddy, and to adopt Sanskritic customs, beliefs and deities. It is very likely that in the next twenty or thirty years the culture of Untouchables all over the country will have undergone profound changes. Some of them may become even more Sanskritized than many Shudra castes. The Constitution has abolished Untouchability, and practical steps are being taken to implement the legal abolition. One naturally wonders what position Untouchables will have in the Hindu society of the future.

I have been asked by more than one student of Indian anthropology whether I regard Sanskritization as only a one-way process, and whether the local culture is always a recipient. The answer is clear : it is a two-way process though the local cultures seem to have received more than they have given. In this connection, it should be remembered that throughout Indian history local elements have entered into the main body of Sanskritic belief, myth, and custom, and in their travel throughout the length and breadth of India, elements of Sanskritic culture have undergone different changes in different culture-areas. Festivals such as the Dasara, Deepavali and Holi have no doubt certain common features all over the country, but they have also important regional peculiari-

[10] Dr. Adrian Mayer, however, states that the Balais (Untouchables) in the Malwa village which he is studying are trying to move into the Shudra *varna*. It would be interesting to see if they succeed in their efforts. See Dr. Mayer's essay, "Some Hierarchical Aspects of Caste," *South Western Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. XII, No. 2, pp. 117-144.

ties. In the case of some festivals only the name is common all over India and everything else is different—the same name connotes different things to people in different regions. Similarly each region has its own body of folklore about the heroes of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, and not infrequently, epic incidents and characters are related to outstanding features of local geography. And in every part of India are to be found Brahmins who worship the local deities which preside over epidemics, cattle, children's lives, and crops, besides the great gods of all-India Hinduism. It is not unknown for a Brahmin to make a blood-sacrifice to one of these deities through the medium of a non-Brahmin friend. Throughout Indian history Sanskritic Hinduism has absorbed local and folk elements and their presence makes easier the further absorption of similar elements. The absorption is done in such a way that there is a continuity between the folk and the theological or philosophical levels, and this makes possible both gradual transformation of the folk layer as well as the "vulgarization" of the theological layer.

In the foregoing essay I have stated that it looks as though for the non-Brahmin castes of Mysore, Sanskritization is an essential preliminary to Westernization. I wish to stress here that this is a matter of empirical observation only, and does not refer to any logical necessity for Sanskritization occurring prior to Westernization. It is possible that Westernization may occur without an intermediate process of Sanskritization. This may happen to groups and individuals living in the cities as well as to rural and tribal folk; and it is especially likely to happen under the swift industrialization contemplated by the Five-Year Plans. Increasing Westernization will also mean the greater secularization of the outlook of the people and this, together with the movement towards a "classless and casteless society" which is the professed aim of the present government, might mean the disappearance of Hinduism altogether. To the question of whether the threat to religion from Westernization is not common to all countries in the world and not something peculiar to Hinduism, the answer is that Christianity and Islam are probably better equipped to withstand Westernization because they have a strong organization whereas Hinduism lacks all organization, excluding the caste system. If and when caste disappears, Hinduism may also disappear, and it is hardly necessary to point out that the present climate of influential opinion in the country is extremely hostile to caste. Even those

who are extremely sceptical of the effectiveness of the measures advocated to do away with caste consider industrialization and urbanization to be effective solvents of caste in the long run. The question is, how long is the run going to be? A warning must, however, be uttered against the facile assumption that caste is going to melt like butter before Westernization. The student of caste is impressed with its great strength and its capacity to adjust itself to new circumstances. It is salutary to remember that during the last hundred years or more, caste became stronger in some respects. Westernization has also in some ways favoured Sanskritization. The assumption of a simple and direct opposition between the two and of the ultimate triumph of Westernization, I find too simple a hypothesis, considering the strength of caste as an institution and the great complexity of the processes involved.

It is necessary to underline the fact that Sanskritization is an extremely complex and heterogeneous concept. It is even possible that it would be more profitable to treat it as a bundle of concepts than as a single concept. The important thing to remember is that it is only a name for a widespread social and cultural process, and our main task is to understand the nature of these processes. The moment it is discovered that the term is more a hindrance than a help in analysis, it should be discarded quickly and without regret.

Apropos of the heterogeneity of the concept of Sanskritization, it may be remarked that it subsumes several mutually antagonistic values, perhaps even as Westernization does. The concept of *varna*, for instance, subsumes values which are ideally complementary but, as a matter of actual and historical fact, have been competitive if not conflicting. In this connection it is necessary to add that the grading of the four *varnas* which is found in the famous *Purushasukta* verse and subsequent writings, probably does not reflect the social order as it existed everywhere and at all times. Historians of caste have recorded a conflict between Brahmins and Kshatriyas during Vedic times, and Professor Ghurye has postulated that the Jain and Buddhist movements were in part a revolt of the Kshatriyas and Vaishyas against the supremacy of the Brahmins.[11]

Today we find different castes dominating in different parts of India, and frequently, in one and the same region, more than one caste dominates. The Coorgs are the landowning aristocracy in

[11] See *Caste and Class in India*, Bombay, 1952, p. 65.

Coorg and they have certain martial institutions and qualities, and several local low castes have tried to imitate them. But the Coorgs themselves have imitated the Lingayats and Brahmins. The Brahmins have not wielded political power, and it could be said that some of the qualities traditionally associated with that caste are not respected by the Coorgs, to say the least. Still they have exercised a hold over the Coorgs, as the writings of European missionaries testify. The imitation of the Lingayats by the Coorgs was facilitated by the fact that Coorg was ruled by Lingayat Rajas for nearly two centuries.

But I am digressing : what I wish to emphasize is that in the study of Sanskritization it is important to know the kind of caste which dominates in a particular region. If they are Brahmins, or a caste like the Lingayats, then Sanskritization will probably be quicker and Brahminical values will spread, whereas if the dominating caste is a local Kshatriya or Vaishya caste, Sanskritization will be slower, and the values will not be Brahminical. The non-Brahminical castes are generally less Sanskritized than the Brahmins, and where they dominate, non-Sanskritic customs may get circulated among the people. It is not inconceivable that occasionally they may even mean the de-Sanskritization of the imitating castes.

One way of breaking down Sanskritization into simpler and more homogeneous concepts would be to write a history of Sanskritic culture taking care to point out the different value-systems subsumed in it and to delineate the regional variations. The task would be a stupendous one even if the period beginning with the British rule was excluded. Such a study is not likely to be forthcoming in the near future and anthropologists would be well advised to continue studying Sanskritization as they are doing at present : study each field-instance of Sanskritization in relation to the locally dominant caste and other factors. The next task would be to compare different instances of Sanskritization in the same culture-area, and the third task would be to extend the scope of comparative studies to include the whole of India. Such an approach might also enable us to translate historical problems into spatial problems. It will not, however, satisfy perfectionists, but perfectionism is often a camouflage for sterility.

3. *VARNA* AND CASTE

An attempt is made in this brief essay to consider the relation between caste as it is in fact, and as it is subsumed by the traditional concept of *varna*. The consideration of this relationship is both important and overdue, as the concept of *varna* has deeply influenced the interpretation of the "ethnographic reality" of caste. *Varna* has been the model to which the observed facts have been fitted, and this is true not only of educated Indians, but also of sociologists to some extent.

The layman is unaware of the complexities of *varna*. To him it means simply the division of Hindu society into four orders, viz., Brahmana, (Brahmin, traditionally, priest and scholar), Kshatriya (ruler and soldier), Vaishya (merchant) and Shudra (peasant, labourer and servant). The first three castes are 'twice-born' as the men from them are entitled to don the sacred thread at the Vedic rite of *upanayana*, while the Shudras are not. The Untouchables are outside the *varna* scheme.

The layman's view of *varna* is a comparatively late view, and *varna*, which literally means colour, originally referred to the distinction between Arya and Dasa. Professor Ghurye writes, ".... in the *Rg-Veda* the word '*varna*' is never applied to any one of these classes. [Brahmana, Kshatriya, etc.] It is only the Arya *varna* or the Aryan people that is contrasted with the Dasa *varna*. The *Satapatha Brahmana*, on the other hand, describes the four classes as the four *varnas*. '*Varna*' means 'colour', and it was in this sense that the word seems to have been employed in contrasting the Arya and the Dasa, referring to their fair and dark colours respectively. The colour connotation of the word was so strong that later on when the classes came to be regularly described as *varnas*, four different colours were supposed to be distinguished."[1] He states later that the Rg-Vedic distinction between Arya and Dasa later gave place to the distinction between Arya and Shudra.[2]

In the *Rg-Veda*, along with the distinction between Arya and Dasa, there is a division of society into three orders, viz., Brahma, Kshatriya and Vish.

[1] See his *Caste and Class in India*, Bombay, 1950, p. 47.
[2] *Op. cit.*, p. 52.

The first two represented broadly the two professions of the poet-priest and the warrior-chief. The third division was apparently a group comprising all the common people. It is only in one of the later hymns, the celebrated *Purushasukta*, that a reference has been made to four orders of society as emanating from the sacrifice of the Primeval Being. The names of those four orders are given there as *Brahmana*, *Rajanya* (*Kshatriya*), *Vaishya* and *Shudra*, who are said to have come from the mouth, the arms, the thighs, and the feet of the Creator. The particular limbs associated with these divisions and the order in which they are mentioned probably indicate their status in the society of the time, though no such interpretation is directly given in the hymn.[3]

It is interesting to note that though three orders are mentioned in the *Rg-Veda* there is no single term to describe them. A term which originally referred to the distinction in colour and appearance between the conquerors (Arya) and the conquered aborigines (Dasyu), was used later to refer to the hierarchical division of the society.

In the *Varna* scheme of the Vedas there are only four orders, and the Untouchables have no place in it. But there are references in Vedic literature to groups such as the Ayogava, Chandala, Nishada and Paulkasa, who are outside the *varna* scheme, and who seem to be despised.

"It is more reasonable to hold that both these groups, Chandala and Paulkasa, were sections of the aborigines that were, for some reason or another, particularly despised by the Aryans. The Nishadas, on the other hand, seem to have been a section liked by the Aryans, probably because they were amenable to their civilized notions. The Vedic expression '*pancajanah*' is explained by tradition, belonging to the latter part of the period, to mean the four *varnas* and the Nishadas, a fact which shows that these people had, by this time, become quite acceptable to the Aryans."[4]

In brief, ".... the three classes of the early portion of the *Rg-veda* were later solidified into four groups, more or less compact, with three or four other groups separately mentioned."[5] And "the

[3] *Op. cit.*, p. 45. [4] *Op. cit.*, p. 54. [5] *Ibid.*

ideas of untouchability were first given literary expression in connection with the Shudras and the sacrifice."[6]

II

I shall now describe the features of the caste system *implicit* in the *varna* scheme and then try to see how they differ from, or conflict with, the system as it actually functions.

Firstly, according to the *varna* scheme there are only four castes excluding the Untouchables, and the number is the same in every part of India. But even during Vedic times there were occupational groups which were not subsumed by *varna* even though it is not known whether such groups were castes in the sense sociologists understand the term. Today, in any linguistic area there are to be found a number of castes. According to Prof. Ghurye, in each linguistic region, there are about 200 caste groups which are further sub-divided into about 3000 smaller units each of which is endogamous and constitutes the area of effective social life for the individual.[7] The *varna*-scheme refers at best only to the broad categories of the society and not to its real and effective units. And even as referring only to the broad categories of the society it has serious shortcomings. It has already been seen that the Untouchables are outside the scheme, but as a matter of actual fact they are an integral part of the society. The fact that they are denied privileges which the higher castes enjoy does not mean that they are not an integral part of the society.

The category of Shudra subsumes in fact the vast majority of non-Brahminical castes which have little in common. It may at one end include a rich, powerful and highly Sanskritized group while at the other end may be tribes whose assimilation into the Hindu fold is only marginal. The Shudra-category spans such a wide structural and cultural gulf that its sociological utility is very limited.

It is well-known that occasionally a Shudra caste has, after the acquisition of economic and political power, Sanskritized its customs and ways, and has succeeded in laying claim to be Kshatriyas. The classic example of the Raj Gonds, originally a tribe, but who successfully claimed to be Kshatriyas after becoming rulers of a tract in Central India, shows up the deficiency of the *varna*—

[6] *Op. cit.*, pp. 52-8. [7] *Op. cit.*, p. 28.

classification. The term Kshatriya, for instance, does not refer to a closed ruling group which has always been there since the time of the Vedas. More often it refers to the position attained or claimed by a local group whose traditions and luck enabled it to seize politico-economic power. In fact, in peninsular India there are no genuine Kshatriyas and Vaishyas. In this area these two categories only refers to the local castes which have claimed to be Kshatriyas and Vaishyas by virtue of their occupation and martial tradition, and the claim is not seriously disputed by the others. Claims to being Brahmins are much less common.

The *varna*-model has produced a wrong and distorted image of caste. It is necessary for the sociologist to free himself from the hold of the *varna*-model if he wishes to understand the caste system. It is hardly necessary to add that this is more difficult for Indian sociologists than it is for non-Indians.

The position which each caste occupies in the local hierarchy is frequently not clear. It is true, however, that in most areas of the country Brahmins are placed at the top and the Untouchables at the bottom, and most people know who are the Brahmins, and who, the Untouchables. But in Southern India the Lingayats claim equality with, if not superiority to the Brahmin, and orthodox Lingayats do not eat food cooked or handled by the Brahmin. The Lingayats have priests of their own caste who also minister to several other non-Brahmin castes. Such a challenge of the ritual superiority of the Brahmin is not unknown though not frequent. The claim of a particular caste to be Brahmin is, however, more often challenged. Food cooked or handled by Marka Brahmins of Mysore, for instance, is not eaten by most Hindus, not excluding Harijans.

One of the most striking features of the caste system as it actually exists is the lack of clarity in the hierarchy, especially in the middle regions. This is responsible for endless argumentation regarding mutual ritual rank: it is this ambiguity which makes it possible for a caste to rise in the hierarchy. Each caste tries to prove that it is equal to a 'superior' caste and superior to its 'equals.' And arguments are advanced to prove superiority. The vegetarian castes occupy the highest position in the hierarchy and approximation to vegetarianism is adduced as evidence of high status. The drinking of liquor, the eating of the domestic pig which is a scavenger, and of the sacred cow, all these tend to lower the ritual rank of a

caste. Similarly, the practice of a degrading occupation such as butchery, or a defiling occupation such as cutting hair, or making leather sandals, tends to lower the ritual rank of a caste. There is a hierarchy in diet and occupation, though this varies somewhat from region to region. The castes from which a man accepts cooked food and drinking water are either equal or superior, while the castes from which he does not, are inferior. Similarly the practice of certain customs such as shaving the heads of widows, and the existence of divorce, are also criteria of heirarchical rank. Not infrequently, the member of a caste points to some customs of his caste as evidence of high rank, while others point to the existence of certain other customs as evidence of low rank. In cases such as the Smith (Achari) the disparity between the position claimed by the caste and that conceded by the others is indeed great. The Smiths of South India seem to have tried to move high up in the caste system by a thorough Sanskritization of their rites and customs, and this, instead of gaining them what they wanted, has roused the disapproval, if not the hostility, of all the others. Today, very few castes including the Harijan, eat food cooked by the Smith. Until recently, the Smith was not entitled to perform a wedding inside the village, or wear red slippers and so on.[8] It is necessary to stress here that innumerable small castes in a region do not occupy clear and permanent positions in the system. Nebulousness as to position is of the essence of the system in operation as distinct from the system in conception. The *varna*-model has been the cause of misinterpretation of the realities of the caste system. A point that has emerged from recent field-research is that the position of a caste in the hierarchy may vary from village to village. It is not only that the hierarchy is nebulous here and there, and that castes are mobile over a period of time, but the hierarchy is also to some extent local. The *varna*-scheme offers a perfect contrast to this picture.

The *varna*-scheme is a 'hierarchy' in the literal sense of the term because ritual considerations form the basis of the differentiation. It is true that generally speaking the higher castes are also the better off castes, and the lowest castes are also among the poorest, but a

[8] As to why the Lingayats succeeded in obtaining a high position while the Smiths did not, is an extremely interesting problem for the historical sociologist. Both the castes seem to have employed 'shock tactics', but while in one case they came off, in the other, they did not.

ranking of castes on principally economic or political considerations would produce a stratification somewhat different from that based on ritual considerations. The disparity between the ritual and economic or political position of a caste is often considerable. In the Mysore village of Rampura, for instance, the Brahmin priest is accorded every respect by the village headman who is a Peasant (Okkaliga) by caste. But the headman is the richest man in the village and in the area, the biggest land-owner and money-lender, the official headman of the village, and generally a very influential man, and one of the managers of the Rama temple at which the Brahmin is priest. In secular matters the priest is dependant on the headman. In the summer of 1952, the priest's eldest son passed the lower secondary examination in the first class, and the priest went to the headman's house as soon as he heard the news. He was pleased, confused and even worried. He wanted his son to study further, which cost money, and also meant his going to Mysore which the priest considered a strange and distant city. (As a matter of actual fact, Mysore is only 22 miles from Rampura.) The priest discussed the matter with the headman (who treated his worries half-jokingly), and then went to the headman's mother, an old matriarch of seventy odd years. He sat a few feet away from her and talked to her, addressing her every few minutes as *avva* (mother—the Brahmin equivalent of *avva* would be *amma* or *tayi*, but it is interesting to note that the priest made use of a term of respect which every Peasant used), exactly as a peasant would. He was treating her advice with respect though according to the *varna*-scheme, she is a member of the *Shudra* caste.

A member of a higher caste often goes to a rich and powerful member of a lower caste for help and advice. It is clear that in such cases the former is dependent upon the latter. When members of different castes come together, their mutual positions are determined by the context in which the contact takes place. Thus, for instance, in a ritual context, the priest would occupy the higher position while in a secular context, the headman would occupy the higher position. This way of formulating the situation is not very satisfactory as behind the particular contexts there lie the permanent positions. In the example given above, the headman and his mother knew they were dealing not with an ordinary peasant, but with a Brahmin and a priest at that. He normally occupied a position of respect; and as priest of the Rama temple he had a

special claim on the headman's help and support. Helping him would result in the acquisition of *punya* or spiritual merit. Helping any poor man confers spiritual merit, but more merit would accrue when the poor man is also a Brahmin and a priest. The Headman also needs the services of the priest, and when any important Brahmin friends visited Rampura, he would ask the priest to provide food for them.

The *varna* scheme has certainly distorted the picture of caste but it has enabled ordinary men and women to grasp the caste system by providing them with a simple and clear scheme which is applicable to all parts of India. *Varna* has provided a common social language which holds good, or is thought to hold good, for India as a whole. A sense of familiarity even when it does not rest on facts, is conducive to unity.

It is interesting to note that the mobility of a caste is frequently stated in *varna* terms rather than in terms of the local caste situation. This is partly because each caste has a name and a body of customs and traditions which are peculiar to itself in any local area, and no other caste would be able to take up its name. A few individuals or families may claim to belong to a locally higher caste, but not a whole caste. Even the former event would be difficult as the connections of these individuals or families would be known to all in that area. On the other hand, a local caste would not find it difficult to call itself Brahmin, Kshatriya or Vaishya. Even here there might be opposition, but the parvenus may distinguish themselves from the local Brahmin, Kshatriya or Vaishya by suitable prefixes. Thus the Bedas of Mysore would find it impossible to call themselves Okkaligas (Peasants) or Kurubas (Shepherds), but would not have difficulty in calling themselves Valmiki Brahmins. The Smiths of South India long ago, in pre-British times, changed their names to Vishvakarma Brahmins. In British India this tendency received special encouragement during the periodical Census enumerations when the low castes changed their names in order to move up in the hierarchy.

4. CASTES: CAN THEY EXIST IN THE INDIA OF TOMORROW?

The question which I have been asked to answer is worded vaguely, but the vagueness is deliberate—it is designed to permit discussion on two questions: one, should castes exist in the India of tomorrow, and two, are they likely to exist? The first question belongs to the realm of ideals while the second, to the realm of facts. I will consider the former question first.

It must be clear to everyone that in this country only a small minority which is numerically insignificant but which may be—and probably is—powerful, really desires that the caste system ought to go. The vast majority of the population, especially Hindus, not only do not want caste to disappear, but they would probably find it impossible to envisage a social system without caste. To the bulk of the people living in the rural areas, caste is nothing more than a collection of kin groups—agnates and affines—living in a few neighbouring villages. Joint family and caste provide for an individual in our society some of the benefits which a welfare state provides for him in the industrially advanced countries of the West. A man's earliest friends are frequently drawn from his caste, his kin belong to his caste, and his kin are often an important part of his kith. A caste also stands for a certain amount of cultural homogeneity if not autonomy.

The point which I wish to stress here is that only a small minority sees caste as a menace to our national life. I willingly concede that their number is increasing everyday, and that nowadays even in the rural areas one comes across urbanized young men who say that caste has begun to poison relations between people. But it is still true to say that the vast majority of people do not consider caste an evil. It is essential to remember this fact, for nothing effective can be done unless the people themselves are made to realize that caste necessarily means casteism, and that the benefits it offers are bought at a heavy price for the country as a whole. It is not at all an easy task to put across this point to the people, and so far neither the politicians nor the social workers have displayed any awareness of the existence of this difficult problem of communication. The first thing to realize here is that good intentions

are not only not enough, but may even produce the exact opposite of what is intended.

I am not trying to be cynical but I cannot help wondering how many of those who have of late started publicly speaking in favour of a casteless and classless society really mean what they say. Now that this ideal is incorporated in our Constitution, and Pandit Nehru is a very powerful and universally respected man, Congressmen, legislators and other leaders find it more convenient to agree with him than to disagree. Most of us—not only our politicians but our intellectuals as well—are bamboozled into agreeing with something merely because we are afraid to be mistaken for being 'reactionary'. Even discussion of the subject is taboo. In the case of caste this disease has proceeded so far that there is great danger that our talk and policy will leave reality far behind. Secondly, coupled with the widespread fear of being dubbed a reactionary, there is also a shrewd if somewhat cynical appreciation of facts. I know that what I say may seem a contradiction but it really is not so. Agreeing to progressive resolutions satisfies our consciences and assures us of our worldly prospects, while at the same time our sense of facts tells us that nothing serious is going to be done by anyone, and that caste will continue to remain what it is. The best of both the worlds are secured by taking such a course.

In April 1954, I was in a village in Mandya District in Mysore State. A few days previous to my visit to this village a huge fight had occurred between Holeyas (Harijans) and Okkaligas (Peasants) in a neighbouring village, and a few had been seriously injured in the fight. One Okkaliga leader complained to me, "These Holeyas, they are getting above themselves. They are now demanding that our girls be given in marriage to them." I tried to explain to him the aims and ideals of the Congress and the Republic, and added that by voting for the Congress he had tacitly agreed with its policy. He replied, "Then let them [the elected representatives] invite Holeyas to their homes for dinner, and give them their daughters in marriage, and we will follow suit." With his peasant shrewdness he had hit the nail on the head. How many elected representatives are willing to eat food cooked by Harijans, and marry their daughters to Harijan youths? The answer is obvious. But the same representatives will all vote for a casteless and classless State when they meet in Delhi or Bangalore or Avadi.

The principle of caste is so firmly entrenched in our political and social life that everyone including the leaders have accepted tacitly the principle that, in the provincial cabinets at any rate, each major caste should have a minister. (And this principle has travelled from our provincial capitals back to our village panchayats—nowadays the latter give representation on the panchayat to each caste including Harijans.) In the first popular cabinet in Mysore State, headed by Shri K. C. Reddy, not only were the ministers chosen on a caste basis, but each had a secretary from his own sub-sub-sub-caste. And today in Mysore State this principle is followed not only in every appointment, but also in the allotment of seats in schools and colleges. Mysore is no longer ruled by the mythical demon Mahishasura, but by the very real demon Varnasura. One Okkaliga in Rampura told me indignantly, "Shri Hanumanthayya [then chief Minister of Mysore] wants to rule strictly and impartially, but he must realize that the electors don't want it. They want him to confer favours on the people who have elected him. We want returns for what we have done." I am afraid the Okkaliga was right—voting is on a caste basis and voters do not understand that it is not right to demand that the elected minister help his caste-folk and village-folk. It is at the same time a tribute to Shri Hanumanthayya that he does not think on caste lines. But his party does, and the people do, and this fact cannot be forgotten. Incidentally, no explanation of provincial politics in any part of India is possible without reference to caste.

Mere resolutions and laws are worse than useless as they lead us to believe that we are really doing something. And I must tell you bluntly that if you are thinking that you can get rid of caste easily you are seriously mistaken. Caste is an institution of prodigious strength and it will take a lot of beating before it will die. The first lesson to be learnt here is not to underestimate the strength of your 'enemy'. It is so powerful and pervasive, and its appeals are so strong that the first step in the struggle is to have a precise measure of its strength.

I must mention here, however, that the Anti-Untouchability Law is having some effect chiefly because some educated and better-off Harijans are trying to get the law enforced. But this is not an easy matter for them. Naturally their efforts have led to an increase in the tension existing between Caste Hindus and Harijans, but without such an increase and probably the occurrence of fighting and shed-

ding of blood, the rights which the Constitution gives to Harijans will not be translated into reality. I will not be surprised if such fights increase in the near future, especially in the villages. As Harijans get more and more educated, and as their economic condition improves, they are bound to resent increasingly the disabilities which the fiat of brute Hindu majority imposes on them. The latter are not likely to yield gracefully to the former's demands and the general public will only awaken to the issues when fighting and bloodshed occur. It is only then that issues which are being currently discussed by sociologists and social workers will be discussed everywhere, in streets, tea shops and verandahs.

The giving of the vote to the Harijan is also a crucial measure. In the legislative assemblies, Caste Hindus will be increasingly on the defensive, as they will not have the courage to come out openly against measures to improve the conditions of Harijans. Overt agreement and covert sabotage will probably be the path they will choose. And in this they will probably have the bulk of their co-religionists with them.

I will now deal with the second question. "Are castes likely to disappear in the India of tomorrow?" In trying to answer this question a reference to what has happened in the recent past is unavoidable.

What may very loosely be called a 'feudal' type of society prevailed when the British overran India. Only a tiny section of the people lived in the few cities scattered over the sub-continent while the vast majority lived in villages. Those cities were, however, different from the modern industrialized ones. Living in them did not require a radical departure from the traditional way of life. In the village a subsistence economy prevailed. Relationships between individuals and groups were governed not by contract but by status. i.e., birth in a particular family and caste largely determined one's rights and duties. Relationships were also 'multiplex'—the same people were involved with each other in several kinds of relationships. Barter was widespread and important while money played a minimal part. The political system consisted of local chieftains who were feudatory either to a distant king, or to the viceroy of an even more distant emperor. Relations between chieftains, and between them and the king or viceroy were always unstable, and frequently characterized by warfare. The political system erected nearly impassable barriers between one chiefdom and another. This had many important

effects one of which was that it prevented the horizontal spread of caste solidarity beyond the chiefdom, and forced the many castes of a region to be interdependent.

At the village level castes were not only interdependent but acutely aware of the fact, and the annual grain-payments made to the Smith, Potter, Barber, Washerman and Priest dramatized the interdependence. While each caste had its own solidarity, it was also aware of its solidarity with other castes—each Smith, for instance, competed with all other Smiths for the custom of the landowners. Besides this competition, other kinds of ties such as those between master and servant, landlord and tenant, creditor and debtor, and patron and client cut across the divisions of caste. Again, loyalty to one's village was universal, and this was common to all the castes from the Brahmin to the Harijan. It is necessary to point out here that the Harijan occasionally exercised authority over members of the upper castes and this was specially true of south India. Historical evidence going back to a few centuries testifies to his taking an active part in the deliberations of the village assembly. Even as recently as fifty years ago the Holeya *cheluvadi* (hereditary servant of the assembly of village elders) of Kere village beat a rich Smith from Mysore because the latter had the audacity to wear red slippers (*chadavu*), a privilege expressly forbidden to them in that area. The Smith was a powerful man and he had lent money to the tune of several thousand rupees to the village.

At a higher level, several neighbouring villages were bound together by ties of kinship, economy and ritual. The warring chieftains prevented the extension of ties beyond the region though here and there we find that the Brahmins were considered superior to these political cleavages because of their position as priests. The 'bottling up' of caste ties within the region, and the derivative emphasis on interdependence of all the castes living therein, was an important feature of the pre-British system. With, however, the establishment of *Pax Brittanica* over the entire sub-continent, and the rapid improvement in communications which both strategic and administrative considerations required, castes found it possible to range over wide areas.

The horizontal solidarity of a caste gained at the expense of the vertical solidarity of the castes of a region. The coming in of printing, of a regular postal service, of vernacular newspapers and books, of the telegraph, railway and bus, enabled the representatives of a

caste living in different areas to meet and discuss their common problems and interests. Western education gave new political values such as liberty and equality. The educated leaders started caste journals and held caste conferences. Funds were collected to organize the caste, and to help the poorer members. Caste hostels, hospitals, co-operative societies etc., became a common feature of urban social life. In general, it may be confidently said that the last hundred years have seen a great increase in caste solidarity, and the concomitant decrease of a sense of interdependence between different castes living in a region.

Certain additional factors have helped to increase horizontal solidarity as well as the tensions existing between different castes. The virtual monopoly which the upper castes, if not the Brahmins, exercised over the new jobs induced the British to start favouring the low castes. In the South this resulted in the gradual forging of an anti-Brahmin policy by the different states. The barrier which already existed between Caste Hindus and Harijans was carried over to the political sphere as well. Educated members from different castes competed for the jobs in the government, and there were more men than jobs. The tensions generated between individuals in the struggle for jobs spread to their respective castes as it was the elite of each caste which was competing.

One of the short-term effects of universal adult franchise is to strengthen caste. It is easily understandable that the villager, other things being equal, prefers to vote for his casteman. This is so widely accepted that during the recent elections in Andhra State even the Communists were at pains to select candidates who had a 'social base', which, when translated into simple English, means that they came from the locally dominant castes. I learn there was only one exception to this, and he, an all-India leader, was duly elected.

The things I have said so far may appear to be extremely pessimistic. I will now therefore point out the existence of certain other and opposing tendencies. As education spreads among the Harijans, it will be increasingly difficult for the Caste Hindus to keep them in the condition in which they are today. There are also signs that the Harijans are organizing themselves to assert the rights which the Constitution gives them. As I said before, this will probably mean the occurrence of fighting between them and Caste Hindus, and an immediate increase of tension, but the latter are bound to give way in the end. Let no one expect however,

that the process will be smooth, quick and non-violent. It would be against the nature of things to expect Untouchability to disappear overnight.

Industrialization and an expanding economy will mean jobs to educated people and this should minimise the bitter inter-caste hatred which is now poisoning relations between individuals and groups. This is especially true of the South where, in the towns especially, one hears of nothing except caste. I believe that the establishment of a single factory will do more to ease intercaste relations in that locality than an equivalent sum of money spent on propaganda in favour of intercaste dining or marriage. The mechanization of labour and the provision of underground drainage everywhere will make unnecessary the personal handling of material which is considered not only very dirty but defiling. A new type of education in which the fingers are used for other things besides driving a quill should inculcate not only a respect for, but a love of, manual labour. Widespread industrialization—and not the crazy concentration of industries in and around Bombay, Calcutta and a few other cities as at present—will usher in towns in every part of India, and the heterogeneity and habits of urban life should help somewhat in reducing inter-caste tensions. Co-education is bound to make inter-caste marriages more frequent in the future, but I would urge reformers to go slow on this. Marriage is a 'hard point' and too much propaganda at this stage about the desirability of inter-caste marriages may frighten the upper castes into taking a stand against all reforms.

In short, on a short-term basis the country is likely to have more trouble with caste, while on a long-term basis, adult franchise, the industrial revolution which our Five-Year Plans are helping to bring about, the spread of literacy and higher education among the lower castes, the legal rights given to Harijans, the privileges given to backward castes, and the greater Sanskritization of the way of life of the latter, should gradually remove the more obnoxious features of the caste system. In the meanwhile, reformers would do well to study caste more, and realize that quiet hard work, patience and a sense of humour are indispensable in fighting an institution as powerful as caste.

There is one question which, though extremely important, I have refused to consider, and that is, "What will happen to Hinduism when caste disappears?" It raises such far-reaching issues that I cannot hope to deal with it satisfactorily here.

5. THE INDUSTRIALIZATION AND URBANIZATION OF RURAL AREAS

A point which everyone will readily concede is that rural areas are changing in every part of India. All social change is in a sense relevant for our purpose but some of it is more directly relevant. It is on the latter kind that I wish to concentrate.

To understand social change it is necessary to know what the society is changing from. I shall therefore first try to characterize briefly the nature of rural society in pre-British India. In this connection it is necessary to make clear that all those forces, external and internal, which broke the isolation of the village community and helped to bring about a change however slight, in the traditional social order, paved the way for industrialization and urbanization. For industrialization does not merely refer to the use of large and complicated machinery, and urbanization does not only mean the great concentration of human beings in small areas : they both require certain types of socio-economic relationships and a *weltenschaaung* which are in conflict with the traditional social order.

My guess is that the characteristics which I am about to mention were very broadly true of rural areas all over India. The first and the most striking characteristic is the isolation of villages from each other consequent on the absence of roads. Even now, after a century of improvement in roads, inter-village communications are quite primitive. A majority of these roads are not even fit for bullock carts. And in large parts of the country, villagers live in a state of more or less complete physical isolation during the monsoon. In a village not thirty miles from the great city of Bombay the inhabitants had to store up provisions and fuel for the monsoon like the citizens of a beleaguered city, and this state of affairs was put an end to only fifteen years ago when a bridge was built. The building of the bridge may be described as the watershed in the history of that village as it was the single most important factor in urbanization.

It is essential to stress that this isolation was not, however, complete. Contact was always there, with a few neighbouring villages, with nearby weekly markets, with centres of pilgrimage, and

perhaps with the town where the chief or Raja had his capital. Neighbouring villages exchanged girls in marriage, and the festival of a village deity frequently demanded the cooperation of several villages. In northern India, villages are exogamous, and the optimum distance between affinal villages seems to be between eight to twelve miles.

Again, the division of labour enjoined by caste necessitated cooperation between neighbouring villages. Every village does not have every essential caste—in fact, it is frequently found that a Barber in village A also serves B and C, and a Washerman in village C also serves A and B, and so on. This is strikingly seen in Kerala where dispersed villages are the rule, and one artisan family has the rights of service (*avakasham*) in several neighbouring villages. The circles of villages served by each of the artisans in a village overlap only to a limited extent.

I fear that I have laboured an obvious point, but as the myth that the Indian village was traditionally a self-sufficient little republic has had distinguished advocates and has such serious political implications, that it seems desirable to emphasize the opposite point of view. The typical Indian village was not self-sufficient even before the advent of railways and buses, and it is absurd to talk of 'reviving' something that never existed.

Another feature of pre-British rural India was the prevalence of widespread political instability. The lowest level in the political system was that of the village headman and the next level was that of the chief who ruled over a cluster of villages. Warfare was endemic and when two chiefs came together it was only to defeat a third. Above the chief was a Raja who was perhaps in turn subordinate to an emperor or his viceroy. A weak emperor or viceroy often meant that the Raja became practically independent and this was also true of lower levels. In such a system, the political cleavages were very real and tended also to be cultural and social cleavages. One of the consequences of such a vertical division was that the horizontal spread of caste ties could not go beyond the chiefdom. In other words, the castes living in a chiefdom were forced to look to each other for help. It was *Pax Brittanica* which freed castes from these vertical barriers. The improvement of communications, the introduction of cheap postage and printing enabled members of a caste living far apart to meet occasionally and to keep in regular touch with each other. This, together with the preferential treat-

ment extended to the backward castes by the British, laid the foundations of modern 'casteism.'

In pre-British India relations between individuals and groups were largely determined by birth into a particular caste and family. Again, any two individuals were tied to each other by a variety of ties, economic, kinship, political and ritual. This was both the result and condition of stability. Besides, the fact that very little money circulated in the country as a whole, and especially in the rural areas, guaranteed that rural society had minimal participation in the urban sector.

Political conquest by the British was followed by the development of communications. A uniform civil and criminal law was introduced, and an organization was gradually evolved to fight the periodic famines. Measures were taken to improve public health. Certain customs like *suttee* were abolished, and Western education was introduced. These measures had a profound effect on social life in the villages. The establishment of British rule in India meant that every village, however remote, became part of the widest political community then known, viz., the British Empire. This was soon followed by the extension of an economic network which spread over the whole world including India. For instance, the fortunes of the cotton crop in the U. S. A. affected the Indian cotton-grower : the cotton famine and civil war in the U. S. drove home to the British manufacturers in Lancashire the wisdom of having an alternative source of supply of cotton in India. The development of cotton as a cash crop affected the peasantry in several parts of the country. It brought money to the villages and tied up the fortunes of peasantry with events happening 5,800 miles away, and over which they had no control. But the prosperity which cotton brought had important effects on the growers. An interesting account of the effects of cotton prosperity in the Wardha Valley during the American Civil War is given by Rivett-Carnac, who was Cotton Commissioner of the Central Provinces then.

> "The cultivator was emancipated during that period from the money-lender and many capital improvements were made, fruit trees planted, wells dug, irrigation developed and housing improved. There was also a general levelling up of the caste hierarchy (though not without struggle) as the lower castes secured enough wealth to take on the costumes and customs of the higher

castes. Marriage and other ceremonies became more lavish and silver plough shares and tyres of solid silver for cart wheels made their appearance here and there.[1]"

Rivett-Carnac's observations on the peasants of Wardha Valley in the sixties of the last century may also be applied, with some modifications, to Indian peasantry during the Second World War. Mrs. Scarlett Trent who made a study of two villages in Mysore in 1954-56[2] and Dr. Chapekar who made a study of Badlapur near Kalyan,[3] have both reported increased spending on weddings as a result of the boom brought about by the War. Mrs. Trent also reported the purchase of better ploughs and fertilizers.

Prosperity does not always result in spending on the same items either in the case of individuals or in the case of villages. The inhabitants of Badlapur repair their temple while those of Manhalli would like to spend on personal luxuries and on decorating the walls of their houses. The inhabitants of Kere renovated their temples while the leaders of Rampura invested money in rice and flour mills, buses, shops, and urban housing.

When Rivett-Carnac reported that the lower castes secured enough wealth to take on the customs and costumes of the higher castes, he highlighted a widespread and important process. When a caste becomes prosperous, it tries to stake a claim to being a higher caste. This claim is usually preceded by attempts to alter diet, dress, customs and rituals. An expanding economy brings money to more groups and occasionally to groups very low in the caste hierarchy. When the latter Sanskritize their way of life, a certain amount of disturbance occurs in the social system. The politico-economic forces released during British rule brought about greater mobility in the caste system.

I shall now consider the changes which are occurring in a few villages. Manhalli, one of the two villages studied by Dr. Trent, is at a distance of five miles from the sugar factory town of Mandya.

[1] Seth Leacock and Mandelbaum, D. G.: "A Nineteenth Century Development Project in India: The Cotton Improvement Program", *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, Vol. III, No. 4, July 1955, Chicago, pp. 334-57.

[2] Scarlett Trent: "Irrigation and Socio-Economic change in a Mysore Village", *Economic Weekly*, Vol. VII, No. 37, 10th Sept. 1955, pp. 1091-94.

[3] Chapekar, N. S.: "Social Change in Rural Maharashtra," *Prof. Shurye Felicitation Volume*, (Ed. K. M. Kapadia), Popular Book Depot, Bombay, 1954, pp. 169-82.

The factory was started in 1933 by the Government of Mysore following the construction of the Viswesvarayya Canal fed by Krishnarajasagara Reservoir, about nine miles from Mysore City. Before canal-irrigation reached Manhalli, only one hundred acres of arable land were irrigable and the rest were entirely dependent on the monsoon. Even the former were irrigated somewhat unsatisfactorily from a tank. Paddy was grown on irrigated land, and *ragi* and *jowar* on rain-fed land. Sericulture was also practised on a small scale.

Canal-irrigation increased both the extent of cultivable area and productivity per acre. The cultivable area increased by about 23 per cent and there is scope for further expansion. While only 12 per cent of arable land was irrigable before 1939, 76 per cent was irrigable when Dr. Trent made her field-study. Sugarcane was a new crop to Mahnalli and its cultivation brought many new and difficult problems. It is an eighteen-month crop, requiring the acquisition of new and complicated techniques, and needing investment of more capital. It requires iron ploughs, sturdier bullocks and fertilizers, and the cultivator's family has to be supported during the long period between sowing and selling the cane to the factory.

Before irrigation, the price of land varied between Rs. 100-300 per acre whereas in 1955 an acre of dry land fetched between Rs. 300-700 and an acre of wet land between Rs. 1000-2000. Thus irrigation more than trebled land values, but in the first few years many of the smaller landowners sold a part of their land to raise the money needed to bring the rest under cultivation. Even then cane cultivation would have been confined to a few only, if the factory had not shouldered the burden of economic development. The success which the factory has had in this respect demonstrates the crucial role which extra-village agencies play in stimulating industrialization and urbanization of rural areas.

The factory advanced sums of money to peasants at 6 per cent interest to cover cultivation and harvesting costs. It sent round trained fieldmen to teach peasants how to grow sugarcane. It also assured the cultivator of a buyer and a fixed price. The factory field-supervisors estimated the crop grown by each peasant and bought a part of it at a price fixed by the factory. This, incidentally, encouraged the formal partition of joint families, as the factory bought not on the basis of the amount of land cultivated by a family but on the basis of so much cane from each cultivator.

Dr. Trent observes that families tended to divide their property after the birth of the first child. The factory was also responsible for improving the roads along which the peasants carted their cane. It realized early the need for a good network of roads and provided the money necessary for building and maintaining them. The improvement of roads has in turn popularized buses and cycles.

The factory also started a few farms of its own in the neighbourhood, and one such farm is situated in Manhalli. It extends over 130 acres. The land was formerly classified as 'government waste'. The farm employs some men from Manhalli who are given a regular cash wage higher than that obtaining in private farms in Manhalli. The farm-workers also get a bonus, a cost-of-living allowance, and also the benefits of the factory's welfare services, cooperative retail stores, and savings bank scheme.

Before canal-irrigation came in, all agricultural labour was paid for in grain—the quantity was fixed and did not vary with the changing price of crop. Even now labourers working in paddy-fields are paid in paddy. The traditional village servants are also paid in grain but these payments have assumed the character of gifts as the demand for the traditional services is fitful and not serious. This is seen in the fact that only one out of four Potters plies his traditional occupation, and that too as a part-time affair. The Barber in Mandya is preferred to the village Barber, and soap enables the housewife herself to wash the family's clothes. Villagers also have their clothes laundered in one of the laundries in Mandya.

Workers in the cane-fields are, however, paid cash unlike workers in paddy-fields. And the role of cash is increasing—carts, bullocks and ploughs are hired for cash nowadays. Monetization has also encouraged local retail trade—five small shops serve Manhalli, and their main trade is in *beedis*, cigarettes, sweets, fruit and groundnuts. Two coffee shops have also been started in the village. Mandya is visited frequently for shopping and cinemas.

Incidentally, in 1931 Mandya was a town with a population of 5,958, whereas in 1951, the population was 21,158. The sugar factory employed over 1000 people. Its importance increased further when Mandya was made the capital of a new district. An intermediate college was also started in the forties. Trade and transport converged on Mandya. Its weekly fair grew in size while the weekly fairs of neighbouring villages either declined or remained stationary.

Canal-irrigation brought with it severe malaria which resulted in high infant mortality. Manhalli's population rose from 623 in 1931 to only 689 in 1941, but in 1951 it was 949. The increase in the second period was in great part due to the success which attended the efforts of the malaria control board which was established by the Government of Mysore in 1946. According to Dr. Trent, at the present rate of population increase, the prosperity induced by canal-irrigation and cane-growing will be short-lived unless there is emigration or further industrialization.

Manhalli in this respect reflects a national problem. Famine control and prevention and the adoption of public health measures by the State have resulted in a great increase in population, and consequently, greater pressure on land. The fact that occupational specialization of caste does not prohibit every caste from taking to agriculture as a subsidiary or main occupation, and the existence of strong caste bonds and wide kinship ties have accentuated the pressure on land. Here is a problem which is clearly beyond the village society's resources to solve—customs ordain early marriage, abortion is both risky as well as immoral and irreligious, infanticide is a crime, emigration is difficult if not impossible, and knowledge of scientific birth control is absent. Thus the larger society creates problems for the village which the latter is unable to solve with the knowledge and resources available to it. This in turn means that the larger society must take upon itself the solution of the problems of the village community.

An important point which emerges from Dr. A. R. Beals' study of Namhalli,[4] a village near Bangalore, is that it is increasing participation in the monetized national or international economy which effectively draws the village community within the ambit of the larger society—mere legislative measures undertaken by the larger society are not very effective. Thus it was the requirement, under the Ryotwari Settlement of 1886, to pay land tax in cash which resulted in the reversal of most village land to the State which in turn enabled the latter to raise its share from one third of the harvest to half. It was the need to pay tax in cash which forced the villagers to sell some of their produce to urban tradesmen. Finally, the inflation brought about by the two World Wars effectively made Namhalli economy and social system a part of the larger society.

[4] Beals, Alan R.: "Change in the Leadership of a Mysore Village," *India's Villages*, (Ed. M. N. Srinnivas), Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1960, pp. 147-60.

During World War I and for a few years after it, the growing of cash crops such as bananas, potatoes and groundnuts received greater emphasis. The villagers' wants changed as a result of urban contact—they wanted mill cloth and factory tiles. Some of their cash was spent on urban coffee-shops and theatres and cinemas.

After 1920, there was greater recourse to urban law courts—more contact with urban life, and the need to express land ownership in British Indian legal terms were responsible for this tendency. This gradually eroded the authority of the village panchayat, which suffered a severe blow when all but one member perished in the great influenza epidemic of 1919. A further fact was the gradual diminution in the size of the family unit which made it necessary for more families to be represented on the panchayat than before. Small families also meant that less capital and manpower were available for agriculture which in turn resulted in lower production.

World War II brought prosperity to Namhalli. Bangalore was a big supply base and many men of Namhalli found jobs as clerks and factory-workers. Black-marketing and prostitution also brought in money. Namhalli farmers started growing carrots, beetroot, etc., for the troops. The sudden prosperity resulted in improved agricultural implements and livestock, in the building of new houses, in giving higher education to children, in buying cycles, wearing suits, paying doctors' bills, betting on horses, etc. After the end of the War, however, the clerks and workers lost their jobs, and the prices of foodstuffs and vegetables came down sharply. Meanwhile the population had increased, and with it, unemployment.

Rampura, the village in Mysore District which I studied in 1948 and again in the summer of 1952, is a roadside village and World War II brought prosperity to it. The leaders, besides being rich, are men of considerable intelligence. Early in 1948 the leaders submitted a petition to a visiting minister requesting the loan of bulldozers and tractors, and asking for electricity. In 1952 a bulldozer was levelling the headman's land, and by 1955 the village had been electrified. There was a radio in the headman's house, and the two rice mills which had been started in 1950-51 were powered by electricity.

The village leaders had invested their war-time profits in productive and modern ways. In 1950-51 the headman started two profitable bus lines, and built a few houses in Mandya for renting; Patron II opened a grocery and cloth shop during the War and

bought a small Japanese rice mill in 1951, while Patron III started a big rice mill. Patrons II and III belong to the same lineage, and while in 1948 it looked as though the lineage of Patron II would force him to withdraw his support to the headman (Patron I), in 1952 the younger members of the joint families of Patrons II and III were openly giving expression to their dislike of each other. The headman was supporting both.

The leaders of Rampura are Peasants by caste, and but for World War II would have remained rural landlords. Their surplus income would have been invested in land, houses and jewelry. World War II brought in not only much cash but also changed their outlook. Wartime rationing and procurement of grain meant increased contact with government officials, and the black market brought about greater contact with urban traders. Leading villagers became familiar with the rules governing the issue of licences to start buses, rice mills, ration shops etc. As a result of all this, they are now incipient capitalists with one foot in the village and another in the city. They may be said to be economically amphibious—they participate in the rural as well as urban economy and use their position in one to strengthen their position in the other. Their further development as capitalists is only partly dependent upon them. The policies of the leading political parties and of the Government of India would determine the lines along which they will develop.

Kumbapettai in Tanjore District was studied by Dr. Kathleen Gough in 1951-52.[5] The village is typical of Tanjore District where the Brahmins have economic power in addition to their position as heads of the caste hierarchy. In the rural areas they are landowners and the other castes are dependent upon them. Symbols of authority and respect have been highly developed.

In recent years considerable immigration has taken place into Tanjore District from neighbouring and less fertile areas. As a result there is today a large body of landless labourers and poorer tenants in Tanjore District, and legislative action in favour of the latter on the part of Madras Government has not fully solved the problem. Besides, there has been some migration of Brahmins to the towns, and their authority is being increasingly questioned by the lower castes. The Non-Brahmins refuse to show the same res-

[5] Gough, Kathleen: "The Social Structure of a Tanjore Village", *India's Villages*, (Ed. M. N. Srinivas), Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1960, pp. 90-102.

pect which they showed before, and inter-caste eating and drinking taboos are weakening somewhat. One very important development is the success which Communist propaganda is having among the Untouchables and castes slightly higher. Communism seems to be particularly strong among the lower castes in east Tanjore.

One last point about urbanization, and it is true of the whole of South India with the probable exception of Kerala. Urbanization in South India has a caste component—the Brahmin caste led the others in deserting ancestral villages for the towns. They were the first to sense the advantages of Western education, and the sons of those who left the villages became the first teachers, officials, lawyers, doctors and judges. Their position in the social system was strategic—in the rural areas they constituted the religious and landed aristocracy, and in urban areas they had a near monopoly of all the higher posts. To begin with, most Brahmins retained their ancestral land if they did not add to it. Gradually however, the expenses of higher education, dowry system, costly weddings and funerals, made it necessary for them to lose their *pied-a-terre*. The virtual monopoly which the Brahmins had of the important posts and the British policy of preference to the Non-Brahmin and Backward Castes soon led to a popular anti-Brahmin movement.

The anti-Brahmin movement and the depression of the thirties led to the migration of Brahmins from the South and from rural areas to big towns. The more enterprising among them entered trade and commerce or took up a craft. World War II resulted in a tremendous increase in the social space of Brahmins. Young, educated Brahmins were recruited into the army, and saw service in various parts of the world. The Brahmin also became increasingly Westernized. Just as the more prosperous and educated Non-Brahmin castes began Sanskritizing their way of life, the Brahmins started becoming Westernized. This process is still going on and it is too early to forecast its outcome.

6. THE INDIAN ROAD TO EQUALITY

The formulation of the goal of a "casteless and classless society" for India by her leaders is a momentous event indeed. Suddenly, in the middle of the twentieth century, the most stratified society in history decided to place before itself the goal of an egalitarian social order, and took some steps immediately as an earnest of its intentions to achieve it. The Constitutional abolition of Untouchability, the provision of special safeguards for Scheduled Castes and Tribes, and the introduction of universal adult suffrage may be mentioned as some of the more important measures adopted.[1] Subsequently, legislation favouring industrial workers, abolishing zamindari, protecting the tenant-cultivator from eviction and guaranteeing him a fair share of the produce, were passed by the Central and State Governments. A progressively steeper income tax rate, the imposition of an estate duty taxing inherited property, and a determination to extend the public sector and to limit the private sector are some of the other measures adopted.

The desire to bring about an egalitarian social order stems from two sources : a genuine conviction that inequality is wrong and wasteful, and that the mass of the people will not work enthusiastically for an order which will only benefit a few rich people. Again, prudence requires that with two Communist neighbours in the North, India take steps to see that she has a working class which

[1] The Constitution of India prescribes protection and safeguards for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other Backward Classes, either specifically or by way of general rights of citizens with the object of promoting their educational and economic interests and of removing certain social disabilities which the Scheduled Castes were subject to. These are:

(i) the abolition of 'Untouchability' and the forbidding of its practice in any form (Art. 17);

(ii) the promotion of their educational and economic interests and their protection from social injustice and all forms of exploitation (Art. 46);

(iii) the throwing open of Hindu religious institutions of a public character to all classes and sections of Hindus (Art. 25);

(iv) the removal of any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to access to shops, public restaurants, hotels and places of public entertainment, the use of wells, tanks, bathing ghats, roads and places of public resort maintained wholly or partly out of State funds or dedicated to the use of the general public (Art. 15);

is contented and hopeful about the future. Without tapping the enthusiasm of the ordinary people the great task of national reconstruction will not succeed.

I shall try in this essay to lay bare a few, only a few, implications of this desire to achieve an egalitarian society. Even to do that I have to rely a good deal on mere impressions and guess-work. But the subject is as important as it is neglected and even an admittedly inadequate attempt is better than no attempt at all.

What makes the Indian experiment at bringing about an egalitarian order so fascinating to sociologists is that it has to take note of that classic expression of inequality, viz., caste. It is an ubiquitous institution in India, being found among Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Muslims, Christians and Jews. It is the one institution that cuts across religious, regional and class divisions.

There is a widespread impression among educated Indians that caste is on its last legs, and that the educated, urbanized and Westernized members of the upper classes have already escaped its bonds. Both these impressions are wrong. These people may observe very few dietetic restrictions, marry outside caste and even region, but this does not mean that they have escaped entirely the bonds of caste. They show caste attitudes in surprising contexts. And they interact closely with relatives who are steeped in caste attitudes. On occasions they are not loth to make use of caste ties. I have known an intercaste marriage of nearly forty years' standing

(v) the right to practise any profession or carry on any occupation, trade or business (Art. 19);

(vi) the forbidding or any denial of admission to educational institutions maintained by the State or receiving aid out of State funds (Art. 29);

(vii) the obligation of the State to consider their claims in the making of appointments to public services and reservation for them in case of inadequate representation (Arts. 16 and 335);

(viii) special representation in Parliament and State Legislatures for a period of twenty years (Arts. 330, 332 and 334);

(ix) the setting up of advisory councils and separate departments in the States and the appointment of a Special Officer at the Centre to promote their welfare and safeguard their interests (Arts. 164, 338 and Fifth Schedule); and

(x) special provision for the administration and control of Scheduled and Tribal areas (Art. 224 and Fifth and Sixth Schedules).

The population of the Scheduled Castes is now estimated at 5.53 crores and that of Scheduled Tribes at 2.25 crores as a result of the issue of revised lists under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Lists (Modification) Order, 1956. Denotified Tribes number about 40 lakhs.

in which the wife continued to have the attitudes of a Brahmin. The son married an American girl, and the Vaishya sub-caste of the father gave the couple a big party to celebrate the occasion. The contradictions in the above situation may be left to the reader's imagination.

Caste is certainly undergoing some changes. For the educated and urbanized middle classes, *jati* is no longer the endogamous unit. There is also a certain amount of inter-dining with other castes (especially for the men). Occupational homogeneity is no longer there for these groups. But caste is still significant in certain contexts. A Kayastha would like to vote for a Kayastha candidate in preference to a Rajput candidate. The sub-divisions among Kayasthas are becoming less relevant for marriage, inter-dinning, etc. One may call this horizontal consolidation, though 'horizontal' is not entirely an appropriate term, for even the sub-castes of the same caste claim mutual superiority. Harijans are divided into dozens of castes, and even within the same linguistic region, the Harijans usually form a hierarchy. But this has not prevented the Harijans' coming together for political purposes. Caste (in the wider sense) ties are significant in modern India, and every political party takes note of this fact though overtly caste is denounced by important political leaders.

There is a good case for arguing that caste-consciousness and orgnization have increased in modern India. Witness for instance the proliferation of caste banks, hostels, co-operative societies, charities, marriage halls, conferences and journals in Indian towns. Anyone who wants to study the role of caste in administration ought to pay a visit to Mysore State. Caste seems to be the most important consideration in the selection of candidates to posts and in their promotion, efficiency being relatively less important. The systematic application of this doctrine for the last four decades or more has resulted in a steady deterioration in efficiency and honesty. There is a fierce struggle between castes to be classified as 'backward' as a certain percentage of jobs and seats in educational institutions are reserved for the 'backward castes'. This is in addition to the reservation for Scheduled Castes and Tribes. No 'meritocracy' is going to emerge in this situation.

II

The concept of dominant caste which has emerged in recent sociological research is important in this connection. A caste is dominant

when it wields economic or political power, and occupies a fairly high position in the hierarchy. (Even in the traditional system, a caste which acquired economic or political power did generally succeed in improving its ritual status.)[2]

The fact that dominant castes exist in many parts of India makes it necessary for us to try to understand the phenomenon. The Lingayat and Okkaliga of Mysore, Reddi and Kamma of Andhra, Gounder, Padayachi and Mudaliar of the Tamil country, Nayar of Kerala, Maratha of Maharashtra, Patidar of Gujarat, and Rajput, Jat, Gujar and Ahir of North India, are all examples of dominant caste. Traditionally, numerically small castes owning land in rural areas, or wielding political power, or inheriting a literary tradition, were able to dominate the rural scene. It was these castes which first took to Western education and the benefits which it conferred. Nowadays, with the coming of adult suffrage, numerical strength has become very important and the leaders of the dominant castes help the political parties to secure votes. But the traditional forms of dominance have not entirely disappeared and neither has dominance shifted fully to the numerically strongest castes. There is no doubt, how ever, that there is a shift and this traditional phase is marked by inter-group tensions. But what is significant from our point of view is that in many parts of India there are castes which are *decisively* dominant.

When dominance is confined to a single village the dominant caste is able to exercise its influence only in the affairs of the village panchayat. The policy of giving more and more powers to local bodies places new opportunities before castes whose dominance does not extend beyond a group of neighbouring villages. In elections to local self-governing bodies caste considerations are very important, and usually the leaders of the locally dominant castes are elected to panchayats. When dominance extends beyond a group of villages into a region, it influences politics of the State. (See the essay "Caste in Modern India", for illustration of the way in which State politics are influenced by dominant castes.)

The leaders of the dominant caste are shrewd and intelligent people. They have a feeling for political power and economic opportunity. They have a certain amount of money and a local follow-

[2] For a detailed discussion of the concept of dominant caste, see my essay, "The Dominant Caste in Rampura", *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 61, No. 1, February 1959.

ing. Since Independence, they have shown their enterprise in several ways : they have started bus lines, rice and flour mills, and cloth and other shops, taken up contract work for the Government, and built houses in towns for renting. The more adventurous among them have gone into active politics.

The dominant castes have been quick to see that they can benefit from the various development programmes in rural areas. A great amount of money is being spent on rural development, and development officials are under pressure to show quick results. To show results quickly they ought to have the cooperation of the leaders of the dominant castes. No wonder then that complaints are constantly heard that the development programmes have helped only the wealthier section of the rural population. The policy of decentralization has given more power and money to the dominant castes. It would be unduly optimistic to expect that they will use this power and money for everyone's benefit.

While the leaders of the dominant castes are sensitive to economic and political opportunities, they are socially conservative. They do not, for instance, like the condition of Harijans to improve. They have a vested interest in keeping Harijans poor and ignorant. At the present time, Harijans are their most important source of agricultural labour, and if they become educated and conscious of their rights they will be a threat to the position of the dominant castes. Anti-Harijan sentiments are freely heard in the rural areas. Attempts by Harijans to exercise the rights given to them by the Constitution have led to violent attacks on them by the dominant castes. They have been beaten up and their huts burned down, and in addition, they have been subjected to economic boycott. Harijans are among the poorest sections of our agricultural population and many of them are agricultural servants of the land-owning castes. The conditions under which agricultural labourers work are reminiscent of serfdom. I have seen boys of 10-16 years of age being made to do all kinds of work from 5 A. M. to 10 P. M. in return for annual cash wages of fifty rupees, two suits of clothing and two meals a day. This was in a relatively prosperous area, and only ten years ago.

It is true that a great deal has been done for Harijans since the achievement of Independence, but the fact that in the villages they are economically dependent on the higher castes is coming in the way of their speedy emancipation. They must be freed from the

economic control of the higher castes. The best way to do this is to employ them in factories in urban areas. It has been found that ownership of land and membership of the joint family come in the way of their becoming efficient workers.[3] The pull of land, even if it be a quarter of an acre, and the obligations of the joint family, prevent the individual from giving his full and undivided attention to this job. Such a programme will also have the advantage of taking Harijans away from areas where they have been subjected to indignities for a number of years. It will also have the effect of reducing the pressure of population on land.

III

Implicit in what I have said so far is the assumption that there is, very broadly speaking, a coherence between the ritual and economic aspects of the caste hierarchy. That is, the higher castes are generally better off than the lower. Many local exceptions may be cited to the rule, but they do not seriously affect the validity of the general proposition. This has been rendered possible by the fact that, historically, caste has been more flexible than is generally recognized. Those castes which acquired economic or political power were able to raise themselves up in the ritual hierarchy. This process, occurring over a long period of time, has resulted in the upward movement of rich and powerful castes. The dominant castes of today are the products of this historical process. With strength of numbers, wealth and following, they occupy a strategic position to exploit the new opportunities to their own advantage.

Western education opens the door to higher posts in every line, and an analysis of the social composition of students in colleges and post-graduate institutions would reveal the kind of relation which obtains between the traditional hierarchy and the new hierarchy which is coming into existence. This problem has not been studied systematically on an all-India basis but a few studies which have been made in Poona and Baroda suggest that the traditionally privileged groups are very strongly represented while the under-privileged are poorly represented in educational institutions and especially at higher levels.

[3] See S. Epstein's "Industrial Employment for Landless Labourers Only" *Economic Weekly*, Vol. XI, No. 28, 29, 30, pp. 967-72, Special Number, July, 1959.

Generally, Brahmins, Kayasthas and Banias were the first to take to Western education and these groups still show a keener appreciation of the value of education than others. The traditional values of these castes favour education. A relatively poor Brahmin or Kayastha father may pledge his small house or few acres of land to secure higher education for his son while a rich peasant may discourage his son from proceeding to college because he is needed to help in supervising the cultivation of the ancestral estate. In fact, it appears as though the land-owning non-Brahmin castes have had an initial resistance to education and this resistance began to give way only three or four decades ago.

I have described, in the first essay in this book, how an anti-Brahmin movement developed in South India during this century. As a result of this movement the members of the non-Brahmin castes obtained privileges and concessions while at the same time discriminatory practices were built into the administration of the South Indian States. But so far the main beneficiaries of the Movement have been the land-owning dominant castes and not the Harijans or the low artisan and servicing castes. The dominant castes are fighting hard to retain the privilege of being classified as backward. The low castes and the Harijans are becoming increasingly aware of what is happening. They are finding that a lion's share of the jobs, scholarships, seats and free-studentships reserved for the backward castes are going to members of the dominant castes.

IV

Another aspect of caste needs to be mentioned here. The association of each caste with one or more hereditary occupations and their gradation into high and low have resulted in most Indians' developing a deep aversion to manual labour. Villagers consider agriculture to be tough work, but manly and worthwhile. At the same time they envy the man who earns his livelihood sitting in an office chair writing something and issuing orders. When a peasant owns enough land he retires from actual cultivation and confines himself to supervision of others' work. Villagers who have been to school show an aversion to agricultural work. Their aim is to get a white-collared job or to engage themselves in trade.

Villagers consider that an educated man or an official—in fact, anyone whom they respect—should not carry a heavy object, let

alone do manual labour. Doing manual labour is the symbol of lowly status, just as not doing it is the symbol of high status. The same attitudes are prevalent in our offices. It would be interesting to make a study of the proportion of peons to other staff in government offices, and also to make a study of how peons spend their 'working' hours.

In the home too, there is a tendency to employ as many servants as possible. This tendency is accentuated by the fact that Indian men are generally illiterate with their hands and also because caste comes in the way of servants doing several kinds of work. The cook will not wash the vessels, the servant will not clean the lavatories, and the *Mali* will not sweep the garden.

The facts I have just mentioned are known to everyone and they show that hierarchical attitudes are deeply ingrained. They come out in unexpected places. Foreign social scientists are astonished that residential quarters built by the Government of India for its employees in Delhi should observe the hierarchical principle so scrupulously. Granting the need for relating housing accommodation to income-level, should each category of housing be built in compact blocks? Could not the different categories of housing be mixed in each block?

The traditional association between a caste and an occupation has resulted in the prevalence of a certain continuity between rural and urban occupations. Thus rural Barbers when they migrate to towns work in 'hair-cutting saloons', Washermen start laundries, Smiths work in furniture shops, Oilmen sell, if not press, oil, *Malis* work as gardeners, Chamars work in shoe shops and Brahmins are cooks, teachers and lawyers. Practising an occupation which is similar to if not identical with the traditional occupation, and staying in an area where one's caste-fellows stay, people carry into towns the hierarchical attitudes of the village. (Our towns are often towns only in a demographic and not in a social sense.) This is specially true of the poorer people and of the smaller towns. Residential areas in towns have acquired class values, and as usually there is also a certain amount of association of caste or ethnic group with residential area, castes have a tendency to be pigeonholed, in ordinary talk, into classes. I am not stating here that all members of a caste belong to the same class. Heterogeneity of class affiliation is greater with the better-off castes than with the poorer castes. For instance, Brahmins and Kayasthas would show greater heterogeneity than

Harijans. The point which I am trying to make here is that because of the traditional association of a caste with an occupation and because of the tendency for migration to occur in groups there is a rural-urban continuum. People in towns, especially smaller towns, retain caste attitudes and values. The pattern of settlement makes possible the identification of an urban area with a caste and class. Our urban people continue to live in a hierarchical world contrary to the popular impression that urban occupations, small families and absence of pollution enable people to live in 'freedom'. This impression also fails to take note of the intimate ties existing between people in towns and their relatives in villages. I have earlier mentioned the characteristically urban expressions of caste.

There is yet another feature of Indian industrial life which reveals a close relation between caste and class. There is a tendency for a specialized task in a factory to become the monopoly of a caste or regional group. It is possible to speak of 'workshop homogeneity'. Thus in a Baroda factory, immigrants from Uttar Pradesh, non-Brahmin Maharashtrians and lower caste Gujaratis, each tended to be segregated in particular workshops doing the same kind of work while Gujarati Patidars and Maharashtrians from the upper castes preponderated in the white-collar jobs. It is fairly well-known that in appointment to jobs in factories considerations of kinship, caste and region are relevant. Appointments on 'rational 'considerations are still not many.

Kin links are a strong feature of Indian life and they go beyond the nuclear family. Indian morality is still largely made up of kin and caste obligations, and of the rules of religion. Kinship obligations are so strong that they tend to prevail over civic morality. Kinship loyalties tend to perpetuate class and caste differences, and work against egalitarianism. Even those who have to profess publicly their belief in egalitarianism have strong kinship loyalties. This results in a divergence between their beliefs and conduct. When such divergence is widespread, people tend to be cynical. And cynicism is not the proper soil for rousing the necessary enthusiasm in the people for a programme of economic development.

V

In brief, there are today two types of hierarchy, one which is traditional and the other which is emergent. The traditional hierarchy

is articulated in religious terms but it has also an important economic side. Caste system functioned best in a feudal, stationary economy with minimal occupational and spatial mobility. During British rule certain new social and economic forces came into existence which had the effect of making the structure less rigid. The abolition of slavery was followed by the starting of coffee and tea plantations, migration to Africa, Fiji Islands, Malaya and Ceylon, the starting of factories and mills in Bombay, Calcutta and other towns, and the new economic opportunities made possible by the political and administrative integration of the country and the development of communications. Generally the higher castes benefited most from these opportunities, but more rarely, the lower castes also did benefit.

The British started the policy of giving preference to the backward castes. The nationalist forces which were released under British rule, and certain British or European political institutions and ideas favoured egalitarianism. In Independent India several measures, some of them already mentioned, have been adopted which are designed to fight inequality and to further egalitarianism. It must be mentioned here, however, that it was during British rule that there came into existence an Indian middle class, which, while not organized on national or regional lines, had its own interests to maintain and advance. This class may pay lip service to egalitarian ideals, but that should not blind us to the fact that its attitudes are fundamentally hierarchical.

There are those who argue that the nation's first task is to try to increase the size of the cake before we think of cutting it. They argue that in the first place there should be a cake and that the bigger the cake the bigger each person's share. This argument is usually advanced by those who are already getting a good share of the cake. They do not realize that it is not easy to convince workers that a bigger cake will necessarily mean a bigger share for them. And unless they are convinced that they and the country are going to benefit from increased production, they will not put forward their best. It is time Indian upper classes realized that our workers are exposed to propaganda blasts from Russia and China and they are potentially explosive material. It is in the interests of the country and the upper classes to keep them contented.

There are then two hierarchies in India, leaving aside the 'functional hierarchy' which prevails during working hours. (Every

farm, firm, factory and office has its own hierarchy.) The Indian social structure underwent a modicum of liberalization under the British, and the Indian Government has initiated several measures intended to reduce inequality. But the measures are half-hearted and full of loopholes. Above all there is a failure to realize the magnitude, nature and implications of the problem. Intelligence and commonsense are not harnessed in combating inequality. Good intentions alone are not enough.

7. THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM OF INDIAN UNITY

I shall begin with a consideration of the idea of a 'region'. It is popularly imagined that a region is a fixed and definite area which has been there for a long time. This idea is reinforced by the analysis of culture-areas made on the basis of a single criterion or of a group of allied criteria.[1] Such efforts conceal, however, the truth that the idea of a region is contextual and dynamic. The extent of a region varies according to the criteria chosen though there may be a certain amount of overlap between areas derived from the adoption of different criteria. This is not to deny, however, that a linguistic area is a region in a loose sense of the term and that within it there are smaller and more homogeneous areas which differ from each other in many ways. In my study of the Coorgs, I postulated that a linguistic area possessed a 'vertical' unity which was common to all the castes living there from the Brahmin to the Untouchable while caste represented a 'horizontal' unity which cut across the linguistic area.[2] This is specially true of castes at either end of the hierarchy—thus a Brahmin in Uttar Pradesh does share in the same regional culture as a local Chamar, but he also shares some cultural forms with Brahmins everywhere in India from Kashmir to Cape Comorin. This is, however, less true today than it was a few decades ago as the religious customs of the Brahmins are rapidly changing. Culture is used here in the accepted anthropological sense of the material and non-material possessions of a people transmitted by means of language, oral or written, from generation to generation. Every human group has culture in this sense.

It is pertinent to point out here that different parts of a language-area speak the same language differently. Thus in one part of Mysore State, Marathi has influenced Kannada, while in other parts other languages, Telugu, Tamil and Malayalam, have influenced it.

[1] See in this connection, Dr. D. Thorner's brief essay "Demarcation of Agrarian Regions of India: Some Preliminary Notes" in *Rationale of Regional Variations in Agrarian Structure of India*, Bombay, 1956, pp. 46-55. See also Dr. B. Cohn's essay "India as a Racial, Linguistic and Cultural Area" in *Introducing India in Liberal Education*, Ed. by Milton Singer, Chicago, 1957, pp. 51-68.

[2] *Religion and Society Among the Coorgs of South India*, Oxford, 1952, pp. 31-32, 214-18.

(There is much anthropological wisdom in the Shavian remark about two countries being divided by a common language.) Linguists who have worked in the Himalayan foot-hills or Assam or among the tribes of Central India, know that dialects vary from hill to hill, but what is not so generally known is the extent of variation in the same cultivated language in the different areas where it is spoken. The late Prof. F. W. Thomas wrote of Hindi, "The absence of real frontiers in Hindusthan has caused each local form of speech to be a transition stage between its neighbours."[3]

Besides variation between regions in the same language-area, there are also differences between rural and urban areas, and between different castes. Any linguistic survey in India has to take note of castewise differences in the use of the same language. The locally dominant caste plays a significant role in the spread of certain speech-forms in its area.

Before the establishment of British rule, the political system in India, especially at the lower levels, was in continual flux. The lowest political level consisted of petty chieftains who were hostile to each other, and if the viceroy or emperor at the top was either weak or preoccupied with his own affairs, the chieftains made war on each other. This meant that there was constant shrinkage and expansion of a chief's territory. Dynamism was not as marked at the higher levels, though it was not absent even there. Political dynamism at all levels made for the spread of 'alien' cultural and linguistic forms. Thus many of the administrative and revenue

[3] See his essay "Language and Literature" in the *Legacy of India*, Edited by G. T. Garratt, Oxford, 1933, p. 45. He also writes: "But until modern times they (the main Indo-Aryan languages) were not used, except in so far as they were adopted in the religious poetry of sects, for higher intellectual purposes. This region was appropriated by the Sanskrit or, in the case of Musalmans, by the Arabic and Persian. *It may even be said that the languages did not exist.* The poems were originally in dialects, and only occasionally did some dialect, like the Brajabhasha of Hindi, become a standard for certain purposes. For the lack of a common standard there was no correct 'Hindi', etc., in general use: *the learned were often unable to write grammatically the language supposed to be theirs and used only a patois.* In modern times these languages have been called upon to take place in general education, to be media of journalism, and to develop all forms of literature on European line, in which process they have had to contend with difficulties of terminology and language-mixture". (Italics mine.) See also Prof. D. D. Karve's article "Hindi *versus* English" in the *Economic Weekly*, Vol. X, No. 9, pp. 321-26; and J. Gumperz, "Some Remarks on Regional and Social Language Differences in India", in *Introducing India in Liberal Education, op. cit.*, pp. 69-79.

terms in Mysore are derived from Persian through the Marathas and the Muslim rulers of Mysore. More occasionally, political dynamism brought in an alien elite consisting of the relatives, fellow-castemen, and hangers-on of the conqueror, who spoke a different language from the indigenous inhabitants. In such a case, the court language was different from the people's language and the two influenced each other. Migrations of groups of people were also caused by famines which were frequent and they contributed to cultural and linguistic heterogeneity in an area.

Another factor which prevented a language from drawing a ring round an area was the role of Sanskrit as the medium of communication for intellectuals from all parts of India. Even when Sanskrit was not resorted to, the literary version of a language was so Sanskritized that it was unintelligible to ordinary men without the aid of a commentator. This reliance on Sanskrit, directly or indirectly, maintained communication between the learned in every part of India but it also created a barrier between them and ordinary folk. Attempts were made, however, by the Buddhists and Jains and the Tamilians to use the ordinary language for religious and theological purposes, but eventually these also became the languages of learned men, unintelligible to the masses.

It has not been stressed adequately that the intense language-awareness which India is experiencing today is a by-product of her struggle to win freedom from the British rulers. The partition of Bengal was resisted on the ground that it cut in two, a single linguistic area.[4] The leaders of the Indian freedom movement criticized as illogical the British Provinces which cut across linguistic areas. A demand grew for the formation of States or Provinces on the basis of linguistic homogeneity. The leaders of the freedom movement also felt the need to carry the people with them in their struggle and this resulted in an emphasis on the language used and understood by the people.

The concept of a linguistic State is thus a recent one, a by-product of the Indian nationalist struggle. This is mentioned only as a matter

[4] "Finally he (Curzon) exceeded the limits of all his previous high-handed and depotic actions by forcing the partition of Bengal against the will of the people, dividing the language area at one stroke. ... To cut the language area in half at such a time by a stroke of pen was a wanton outrage which stirred Bengal to its very depths with indignation. The whole country was soon ablaze." C. F. Andrews and G. Mukherji, *The Rise and Growth of the Congress*, London, 1938, pp. 202-04.

of fact and not in praise or censure. The creation of linguistic States on 1st November 1956 in most parts of the country has strengthened the barriers between them. This is the first time in Indian history when cultural frontiers were converted into political frontiers. Very soon every State will be using the regional language for every purpose except communication with other States and the Union Government. If, in addition to this, the regional language also becomes the medium of teaching in the universities, there will be complete inter-State unintelligibility. Students will not be able to migrate from one University to another and even the I.A.S. officials will have to stay in one State. It will mean less social and spatial mobility for all sections of the society while the Five-Year Plans aim at the speedy industrialization of the country which presupposes considerable mobility.

During the last hundred years English has provided a means of communication for Indians from different linguistic regions. It gradually succeeded both Sanskrit and Persian as the language of the elite, and it provided not only a common language but also a common ideology, as the English-educated rich and middle classes drew their inspiration from the same European thinkers, historical events, and social and political institutions. It is this elite which led the freedom movement. While it is true that this group became to some extent isolated from the thoughts and aspirations of the ordinary people, and that it has its own interests to perpetuate, the most sensitive and daring elements in it have identified themselves with, and worked for, the people and the country.

Any means of communication which cuts across regional and religious barriers, even only for certain sections of the people, is valuable and worth fostering. It is doubly valuable nowadays when there is widespread confusion in the field of language. Even when it is agreed that Hindi should replace English as the official language, the necessity of preparing for the change systematically and to phase it over a period of time is obvious. But there is a school of thought which argues that Hindi should replace English here and now and that the country should face the consequences of a swift and chaotic change-over. This school regards the retention of English as inimical to the growth of all Indian languages. It believes that all those who argue that the change-over should be gradual and planned are reactionaries who wish to retain English as long as

possible. This belief is held not by a 'lunatic' fringe but by some very influential men both in the Congress Party and outside.

It should not be forgotten in this connection that Hindi is making progress in the non-Hindi areas. To take the South, for instance, quite apart from the compulsory teaching of Hindi in schools, it is encouraging to find Hindi becoming increasingly popular among middle-class women and children. This desire to learn Hindi will gradually spread to the working classes and to the rural areas. The institution of incentives, monetary and otherwise, will further speed up the process. I am certain that the cards are stacked in favour of Hindi and, if the Hindi-speakers show some tact and patience, Hindi will gradually become the medium of communication between Indians from different States. But any attempt to force the pace will do great harm to the cause of Hindi and to the unity of India. It is necessary to stress here that the non-Hindi speakers have been put into a disadvantageous position by the decision to have Hindi as the language of the Indian Union and the least that needs to be done is to give them a decent amount of time to prepare themselves for the change.

It is time that the question of the reform of our scripts was given serious attention. Indian languages are written in cumbersome scripts, and an enormous amount of human energy is wasted in typing and printing them. Besides, the use of different scripts enhances the sense of separation between the various linguistic areas. The use of the Roman script, helped out with diacritical marks, is worthy of serious consideration. Its use breaks through the script-barrier which separates one language-area from another, and at the same time, it links us with the wide world without. Admittedly, script-reform is not easy, but it is worth trying. (In this, as in other things, the emphasis should be on the adoption of methods of persuasion and the provision of positive incentives and not on wielding the big stick.) The Indian Republic has adopted many revolutionary measures including the adoption of decimal coinage, the abolition of Zamindari and Untouchability, and there is no reason why it should not begin to think seriously of reforming scripts.

The movement to bring about unilingual States has left a trail of bitterness and has harmed the cause of the Unity of India. It is now time to think of forging institutions which bring together, in cooperative endeavour, officials as well as ordinary citizens, living

in different States. The 'Zonal Councils' are a good idea and they should be strengthened further.

It would be desirable to create other similar institutions. For instance, a Council for every 'natural region' may be created, and it should be the task of each such council to study the developmental problems of the region, to put forth plans for every area in the region and to act as a liaison body between the planners and the people. The 'natural regions' in the country ought to be defined by taking the advice of geologists, geographers and economists. Such councils will be ineffective if they do not include the representatives of the people in the concerned areas. Serious thought should also be given to the question of creating a council for each major river in the country to look after problems of flood-control, irrigation, water conservation, river pollution and pisciculture. These councils would be cutting across the division into unilingual States.

II

The institution of caste provides a common cultural idiom to Indians: wherever one may be in India one is in a universe of caste. And caste also cuts across religious divisions—it is not only Hindus who are segmented into castes but also Jains, Sikhs, Muslims and Christians. Normally the existence of a common cultural or social idiom is a predisposing condition for unity, but in the case of caste there is a double difficulty. The common cultural idiom means the splitting up of the people of a region into small and water-tight groups. And in the circumstances prevalent today, the lower castes hate the fact that they are considered lower to the upper castes while the latter resent the 'uppishness' of the former, and the fact that they are given special privileges and concessions by the government.

Mobility has increased appreciably in modern India. Each group wants to identify itself with the group above and dissociate itself from the group immediately below. Widespread mobility cannot, however, be equated with a burning zeal for equality. In the latter case, there should be a widespread desire to give the under-privileged every chance to come up, and the upper groups should show a readiness to renounce their privileges. As things are today, more and more power is getting concentrated in the hands of the dominant castes, and the latter resent the attempts made by the lower castes

to move up. This has resulted in inter-caste tensions in several parts of the country.

The bulk of the people still consider caste to be a good institution and they are not at all reconciled to the liquidation of Untouchability. This is specially true of Hindus in rural areas. While the high castes have not shed their sense of superiority, the Harijans are becoming increasingly assertive about the rights which the Constitution gives them. It is likely that clashes between Harijans and locally dominant castes will become frequent in rural areas.

It is obvious that legislation and education are not by themselves enough to liquidate Untouchability. Every well-intentioned move of the Government to improve the lot of Harijans will be frustrated if it goes against the interests of the high castes who have economic and social power over the former. The Harijans are not able to withstand the economic boycott of the high castes, and in those villages where Harijans are in a minority, the other castes may even resort to physical violence. As long as the Harijans are not economically independent of the high castes, the rights which the Constitution guarantees them, will not be translated into practice. The policy of transferring land to the tiller, if successful, is going to help in this connection. The industrialization of the country will remove some of the more irritating features of Untouchability if such industrialization is widespread as well as rapid. The landless labourers, who generally belong to the lower castes, and especially the Harijans, will be attracted to the factories. Urban life is not favourable to practising pollution, and the new towns which are going to come into being, can be so planned that Harijans are not all concentrated in one compact block.

A significant change has taken place in the power relations of the different castes in the last few decades. This is broadly true of India as a whole though it is more true of some areas than of the others. The economic forces unleashed by World War II, and the political and social changes of the last ten years, have vastly increased the power of the numerically large castes. They rarely come from either the Brahmin or Vaishya category of castes. It is usual for them to come from the Shudra category, and more rarely, they come from the Kshatriya or Harijan category. These castes have strong rural roots and are generally landowners employing their own castemen or members of lower castes as tenants and labourers. The leaders of these castes are keenly aware of the stra-

tegic position they occupy in the struggle for political power especially at the local and regional levels. It is these vigorous and self-confident castes which spearhead the opposition to the abolition of Untouchability. They claim equality for themselves with the Brahmin or Vaishya, but as far as the Harijans are concerned they seem determined to keep them where they are at the present moment. The fact that their attitude is contradictory does not bother them.

A man frequently identifies himself with his subcaste and there is a tendency for the achievements and frustrations of an individual to assume group significance. Thus the members of a caste feel proud when one of their caste-fellows passes the I.A.S. examination, or obtains a high post or wins an award. The failure of an educated member of a caste to obtain a job, similarly, causes frustration to his entire caste. Thus the difficulties experienced by a few educated non-Brahmins in Mysore in the first two decades of this century gave birth eventually to the modern anti-Brahmin movement in that State.

The really backward castes are experiencing frustration in the social sphere. The discrimination practised against them in the matter of eating, drinking, marriage and social intercourse, by the high castes makes them feel embittered. They are aware that the numerically, politically and economically powerful dominant castes are hostile to their desire to move up. The highest castes, on the other hand, point to the discrimination systematically practised against them in the matter of admission to scientific and technical colleges and in appointments to government posts. They have a deep grievance that merit is ignored in favour of caste. All in all frustration is widespread.

III

The concept of the unity of India is essentially a religious one. Famous centres of pilgrimage lie in every part of the country, and in pre-British times, pilgrims occasionally walked hundreds of miles across territories infested by wild animals and dacoits and braving disease and privation, to earn religious merit. Some of them preferred to spend their last days in Benares, away from their kith and kin, for the same reason. Linquistic barriers, and differences in custom and usage, do not seem to frighten pilgrims: on the other

hand, they seem to enjoy the diversity of India. They recount with pleasure the special virtues of each shrine they have worshipped in, and each river-spot they have bathed in. They accept the fact that people in different areas have different customs and habits, but underlying this diversity are the same deities and the same myths and legends. That there is a local element in every aspect of Hinduism only seems to make it more interesting.

Many indeed are the customs and rites which reveal a sense of the unity of India but this is no place to catalogue them. I shall only give two examples. Pilgrims who visit Rameshwaram in the South are expected to bathe in the sea there and carry a pot of the sea water to be emptied into the Ganges. Again, the river Kaveri is called Dakshina Ganga or Ganges of the South, and the devout believe that at its annual birth on the first of Libra, the waters of all the rivers of India and the sacred seas are present in the river-source. The faithful are told that there is a secret tunnel from the source of the Kaveri to the Ganges.

Outstanding physiographical features are associated with Hindu deities, and with incidents and characters in the epics and *puranas*. Every major shrine in India has a *sthala purana* describing the mythical associations of the place, and linking it up with divine and epic characters. Eventually, local myth finds its way to the sea of *puranas*, *upapuranas* (minor *puranas*) and epics. Indian intellectuals laugh at the inconsistencies in, and the absurdities of, the *puranas* and epics, but they fail to perceive the function which *puranas* perform viz., knitting together into one religious society the numerous heterogeneous groups in India, and giving them all the sense that their country is sacred. Patriotism is invested with a religious quality. The epics and *puranas* have also helped considerably in the great task of assimilating the many diverse groups which were marginal to, or completely outside, Hinduism. They have also given art-forms to different parts of the country which beneath their diversity deal with incidents in the lives of deities and epic characters which are familiar to Hindus everywhere in India.

A point that needs to be considered here is the idea of conversion as it obtains in Christianity and Islam. It is well-known that it does not occur in Hinduism. "Conversion" when it occurs in Hinduism is an indirect or "backdoor" affair, spread over decades if not centuries, and affects entire groups and not individuals. (I am aware that some Brahmin and Lingayat monasteries have converted indi-

viduals as well as groups of people, and that the Arya Samajists believe in conversion. But these instances do not make the idea of conversion fundamental to Hinduism. Conversion is confined to certain sects and castes.)

In spite of the fact that Hindus have been exposed to contact with Christianity and Islam for many centuries they have not been able to understand or sympathize with the idea that there is only one true religion and every other religion is inferior if not false. The idea that it is the paramount duty of the believers in the one true religion to convert outsiders to their faith, seems natural to the members of the proselytising religions but it appears as intellectual and moral aggression to Hindus. This is specially so when the people who are converted are desperately poor and illiterate. The opening of schools, hospitals and other welfare agencies by missionaries in areas where Harijans and the tribals live, appears to the Hindus as only baits in the trap of conversion. The linking up of humanitarianism with proselytization has made the former suspect. Even very liberal, Westernized Hindus feel this way.

There is another reason why Hindus associate conversion with aggression: the pre-Portuguese and pre-British Christian communities in India do not show any desire to convert others. They are more or less like Hindu castes. But the Europeans who settled down in India either tried to convert directly using all the means available to them or brought in their train missionaries. The Christian missionaries' denunciation of Hinduism had a political tinge as the missionaries belonged to the same race as the rulers. As far as the peasants were concerned, they considered the white missionary as one of the many agents of British Government. During British rule Christianity thus became associated in the minds of Hindus with the ruling group. The fact that in some areas tribal converts to Christianity led separatist movements has deepened the fears and suspicions of Hindus about conversion to another religion. The Niyogi Report on the activities of Christian missionaries in Madhya Pradesh is the product of such fear and suspicion.[5]

As the idea of the unity of India has its origin in the Hindu religion, non-Hindus are excluded from it even though they have many sacred shrines in the country. Religious integration is two-sided: it is true that it binds together closely the followers of a religion but

[5] *Report of the Christian Missionary Activities Committee*, Madhya Pradesh, 1956.

the very process of binding them together divides them from the followers of other religions. In the case of Hinduism, there is an additional factor to be considered: the Harijans and the tribes have been subject to many disabilities and they may want to improve their conditions by adopting all means open to them, including conversion to another religion. In short, such integration may not apply even to all Hindus. The idea of integrating the inhabitants of India on a religious basis is plainly out of the question. The decision declaring India a secular State is a wise and far-seeing one. It is hoped that in course of time people will come to appreciate the idea that members of every religion are equal as citizens. The speedy liquidation of Untouchability, and the suspension, even temporary, of proselytising activities by foreign missionaries would give Hindus a sense of security. This would generate real tolerance and security everywhere and people would then see the secular state as a most important value.

IV

The mention of two processes, viz., Sanskritization and Westernization, is necessary here as they are producing the same or similar cultural and social forms throughout the country. I have discussed them at some length elsewhere and I shall confine myself here only to a few brief remarks. Sanskritization is beginning to transform the culture of Hindu castes from the Brahmin to the Harijan. It cuts across linguistic and other barriers. It is enabling the lower castes and the groups marginal to Hinduism to occupy a high place in the structure of Hindu society. In some parts of the country such as Malwa even Harijans are enabled to cross the barrier of Untouchability, thanks to Sanskritization. Sanskritization is not only transforming the culture of all the castes, and especially that of the lower, but it is also contributing to the decrease of structural distance between the various castes. This is likely to result in greater cohesion among Hindus. The cinema, radio, newspapers and the spread of education will increase the pace of Sanskritization. It should not be surprising if Sanskritization made some headway among a few non-Hindu groups as well.

Westernization is a blanket term for several processes including urbanization, industrialization and the adoption of the ideology as well as the products of modern science. Individuals and groups

may be Westernized in any one or more senses. Thus one group may take to Western dress and dancing while another may take to science and technology. These two groups may differ significantly in their *Weltenschauung*.

The importance of the study of the social aspects of economic growth cannot be over-emphasized. For instance, inter-caste tensions may assume more serious forms when the economy is not growing or growing too slowly than when it is growing fast. In the former case, economic tensions between individuals may be interpreted in caste terms. In the South Indian States today, while it is true that the caste of a candidate is a relevant consideration in his securing a job, in his promotion, etc. the people attribute much more to caste than what is perhaps justified. Caste provides a convenient and widely-accepted explanation for an individual's failure. X did not get the job or a first class because he did not belong to the right caste while Y did. A member from a different caste can always be dragged in as the villain of the piece. Caste, then, is the universal scapegoat in South India, and this in turn increases inter-caste tensions. It is obvious that in such a situation serious attention has to be paid to developing the economy, if tensions are to decrease.

This applies to tensions between regions as well. There will have to be development of every part of the country, otherwise there will be jealousy between the regions. Besides, in democratic planning, the enthusiastic cooperation of the people is a most important asset. And the surest way of ensuring the people's cooperation is to point out to them concrete benefits which they have received from planning.

To be fair to the Government of India, they have recognized the need for 'balanced regional development.' "In any comprehensive plan of development it is axiomatic that the special needs of the less developed areas should receive due attention." They point out that "some industries have to be located in particular areas in view of the availability of the necessary raw materials or other material resources. But there are other industries in regard to the location of which, on economic considerations, there is a field of choice. Often the disadvantages of comparative cost are only a reflection of the lack of basic development."[6] And finally, "The

[6] *Second Five-Year Plan*, Government of India, New Delhi, 1956, pp. 36-37, para 28.

National Development Council recommended that there should be continuous study of the problem of diminishing regional disparities and a suitable set of indicators of regional development evolved."[7]

These good intentions have to be translated into practice for otherwise Planning will not only not have the support of all the regions but also become the means of dividing the country into 'have' and 'have not' areas. It needs hardly to be mentioned that such a division is unhealthy.

V

There is no need, however, to be unduly frightened by the existence of 'divisions' in the country. It is true that a person does feel that he is a member of a particular caste, village, region, State and religion but these loyalties can represent a hierarchy of values and are not necessarily inconsistent with being a citizen of the Indian Republic. Perhaps the recognition that most of these loyalties are legitimate, and that their complete disappearance in the interests of a single monolithic attachment to the country as a whole, is unnatural and perhaps unhealthy, would help to put them in proper perspective. Loyalty to one's language, kin-group and village are instilled into a person in his earliest years and it is wrong to denounce them all as wrong and anti-national. Again, solidarity with one's group seems to require a certain amount of rivalry with other similar groups.

Villagers are frequently found deriding their neighbours, and regarding their own village as a cut above the rest. Similarly a man regards his caste better than other castes and his region superior to other regions. A peasant in Rampura, Mysore State, told me that all the world's intelligence, wealth and good looks were concentrated in Mysore State. He was an intelligent and pleasant man who had travelled outside Mysore State! I would argue that these loyalties constitute a reservoir of energy which intelligent statesmanship could tap for regional development.

I have said that these loyalties represent a hierarchy of values. Let me illustrate. A man stands up for his village in relation to other neighbouring villages, his *taluka* in relation to other *talukas*, and so on. Similarly he is a member of a caste in relation to other castes and a Hindu in relation to non-Hindus. He is also an Indian

[7] *Ibid*, para 29.

in relation to non-Indians. Thus, irrespective of his village or caste or region he reacts like an Indian when the problem of Goa or Kashmir crops up. The Scots, Welsh and English may differ among themselves regarding some matters, but *vis-a-vis* the non-British they are citizens of the United Kingdom. Tensions and conflicts at a particular level maintain the identity and separateness of groups of the same order but these groups can and do unite at a higher level. In fact the existence of the lower loyalties should be regarded as a pre-condition of the higher. The fault is probably in our intelligentsia which conceives of the unity of India in a monolithic manner, with everyone speaking the same language, wearing the same clothes, eating the same food, singing the same film songs and repeating the same slogans and views passed on by the various media of mass-communication. Such a concept of unity naturally makes people afraid of diversity, and of contact with the outside world. Any attempt to impose a monolithic unity will only produce fission. Mere lip service to the need to appreciate India's heritage which is rich in diversity, is not enough.

An important lacuna in the sociologist's knowledge needs to be mentioned here: detailed studies are not available of the processes by which the pattern of loyalties changes in communities. This means that sociologist's are not able to tell in advance whether in any given situation the centrifugal or centripetal forces will prevail. Generalising from historical experiences is not always safe for history rarely repeats itself.

It is necessary to remember this in order to see that people do not put too much faith in the predictions of sociologists. In any intelligent society there should be a certain amount of scepticism towards the pronouncements of experts. Having uttered this caution, I would like to state that the prospects for India emerging as a strong and united country are not at all bad. Given quick economic development of the country as a whole and of its different regions, real tolerance in the matter of language and religion, and a determined effort to fight the evils of caste system, India should emerge as a strong and united country.

8. THE STUDY OF DISPUTES IN AN INDIAN VILLAGE

Within a few days of my arriving in Rampura village, I heard vague reports of a case of arson in which a poor man's straw-rick had been burnt down by a man from a neighbouring village. The better-off villagers each gave a head-load of straw to the injured man, and the result was that he obtained more straw than he had lost. The villagers did not give me the details of what had happened, and such facts as I obtained came my way a few months later when there occurred another case of arson. When a dispute occurs, people's memories are stimulated and precedents are quoted. Something like case law exists, though it is not systematized.

At about the same time, a widow brought a complaint against another woman who had accused her of leading an immoral life. I managed to secure a brief account of the incident but not at all in sufficient detail. It was clear that the villagers did not like giving information about the 'seamy' side of village life to an outsider. I felt that this was a challenge to me as a field-worker. Besides, I must confess that like the villagers I found a dispute broke the monotony of village life, and gave people something to talk about. The villagers were quick to see the humorous side of disputes.

Disputes also had a dramatic quality. Thus one afternoon a man walked into my verandah dragging a lamb's skin with him, hurled it before Nadu Gowda, a respected elder, saying, "Mrs. Siddamma's dog ate up my lamb. You must secure justice for me." Or again, another afternoon, Mrs. Khasu, a Muslim, was pouring forth a Niagara of words in Kannada as well as Urdu, while laying her case before the Headman. The assembled men were all enjoying her oratory—in fact, some of them had previously expressed a hope that I would get a chance to listen to her oratory before I left the village. (There was a 'master' of abuse in the village, a peasant woman, and a boy offered to steal her fowl so that I could record her abuse!)

A good many disputes have a public as well as a private side. The former would take place in the field or street or on a verandah, while the latter inside the house. Only in a few 'partition' cases was I able to witness a private session. The fact of my being kept out of the private sessions spurred me to devise ways and means by which I could get to know what had happened in them.

Every society has its own preoccupations, and whatever the problem the field-worker is pursuing, he cannot entirely ignore the former. It is only in a village or area which has been already studied sufficiently intensively that he can ignore the preoccupations of the people to concentrate on his own particular problem. I was insensibly led into paying some attention to disputes even though my main interest was the delineation of inter-caste relations. I am afraid that the amount of time and energy I could spare for disputes was not at all enough. This was especially so when I had to keep track, as I had to occasionally, of two or three disputes each of which ran for a few weeks.

Partition disputes generally tend to drag on. When the idea is first mooted, it is at the end of a series of quarrels for which the women, especially those who have come in by marriage, are usually blamed. The elders who are approached to effect a division of the property among the coparceners usually advise them to stay together and keep their women in control. After a while quarrels again break out, and finally, the elders concede that it is better to divide than to quarrel perpetually. Then a second set of quarrels occur—how should the property be divided and who should get what? There are some conventions regarding this, but they do not prevent quarrels. After the property has been divided, one member feels that he has fared badly and he demands a redistribution. In such a case, adjustments are made with some difficulty and the document registered to ensure that similar demands are not made again. Another set of quarrels arises during the paddy-transplantation season when the bunds separating the flats are trimmed, and brothers, who are usually neighbours, accuse each other of encroachment. Rights of way across a brother's field and right to irrigation water flowing through it, are other matters over which disputes occur. Such disputes go on for years. The partition of property among brothers does not promote amity and it is frequently found that adult brothers are not on speaking terms with each other. While the members of a lineage show solidarity in relation to other lineages, among themselves there are tensions. The narrower the lineage-span, the greater the tension. An exception to this rule is the elementary family when the siblings are still very young.

Besides the reluctance of the people to discuss the seamy side of their life before a respected outsider, there are other difficulties. Only some of the 'facts' of a dispute are accepted as such by all.

And even the 'same' facts are fitted into different configurations by different people. The arbitrators as well as the neighbours and onlookers know the disputants intimately, and everyone has his own image of the character and personality of each disputant. This is a pre-existing image and the facts of the dispute are woven into it. But the image is not unchangeable.

Let me give an example: In a dispute between two Oilmen uterine brothers, the elder brother's wife, a strong personality and an attractive woman, was found walking in the direction of the river Kaveri at about 3 p.m. A farmer saw her and asked her where she was going and she replied that she was going to the river. She was so fed up that she wanted to drown herself in the river. When this was mentioned during the dispute, a few men laughed and said, "Is she the type which commits suicide?" One of those who laughed was an arbitrator. Here the 'objective' fact is the woman's walking to the river and expressing her intention to drown herself. This is interpreted differently by different people. The danger is that interpretation and fact are so closely woven that if the sociologist is not continually on the alert, he is in the danger of accepting some interpretations as facts.

These interpretations are not haphazard but are related to other factors. Thus, a decision of the village or caste council is often explained by saying that the Headman or another powerful arbitrator wanted to favour his kinsman or casteman or friend or client. In "The case of the Potter and the Priest" the Headman was stated to have changed his decision overnight about the punishment to be meted out to two people accused of fornication because an agnatic kinsman of his was suddenly brought before him accused of attempted rape.[1] He could not pass a harsh sentence on one and a lenient one on the other. The interests of a powerful man like the Headman spread everywhere and he is likely to remember his interests while judging cases. An arbitrator also has his prejudices. Thus Nadu Gowda, normally a fair man, disliked one Untouchable in particular, and this came out sharply whenever a matter concerning him came up for discussion. Friendships are common and occasionally cut across caste lines, and they influence the interpretation put upon events by witnesses as well as arbitrators. Finally, the solidarity of the dominant caste and the kind of local leadership which it has, are relevant facts in the dispensation of justice.

[1] *Man in India*, Vol. 39, No. 3, 1959, pp. 190-209.

Where the defendant is a powerful leader of a large faction, the arbitrators tend to be lenient because the defendant is capable of defying them and thus endangering the entire fabric of village law and order. (I am assuming here that factions are not so deep that the village council no longer functions.) There are saws which elders quote: "We floated the matter away" (winked at it), "We let it slip through our fingers" (ignored inconvenient facts), and so on. One arbitrator mentioned how when he raised a point during the settlement of a dispute, the Headman's son winked at him to make him keep quiet. The poorer villagers are heard complaining about the corruption of arbitrators.

I must hasten to add here that this does not mean that the arbitrators can do just what they like. The ideal of justice (*nyāya, dharma*) is there, supported by moral and religious sanctions. The arbitrators cannot entirely and consistently ignore public opinion. There are also unwritten rules of evidence. In "A Caste Dispute among the Washermen of Mysore", the defendant trapped the plaintiff by making him eat food handled by her, and also took care to see that a witness was present on the occasion.[2] This was one of the crucial facts in the case. As I mentioned earlier, one of the tasks of village councils is to determine what are the facts of the case. Evidence is insisted upon, and a distinction is made between direct and hearsay evidence. The reputation of a witness is important in evaluating the truth or falsity of his statements. A person is sometimes made to swear to the truth of a statement in a temple. But this is an extreme measure.

The tutoring of witnesses seems to occur frequently and this makes the arbitrator's task all the more difficult. In some cases, tutoring is not necessary as the man has an interest in *suppresio veri* and *suggestio falsi*.

It is usual for a man to know only some of the events which have occurred, but he maintains that what he knows is not only true but is the whole truth. This was brought home to me when I was taking notes of the dispute between the Potter and the Priest. What I did then was to confront one informant with another's version. It is obvious that several versions are more likely to yield the truth than a single version.

Then there are men who have a vested interest in disputes. They try to further their interest which may be monetary gain, or a

[2] *Eastern Anthropologist*, Vol. VII, Nos. 3-4, 1954, pp. 149-68.

trip to a town ostensibly to see a lawyer or official, or to further their sense of self-importance. The existence of such men is not only recognized, but they are credited with having even more influence than they actually do. (They also provide convenient scapegoats.) The words 'chitāvaṇi' (instigation) and 'kitāpathi' (love of creating quarrels) are frequently heard in the village. My invaluable friend and assistant Kulle Gowda was active whenever a dispute occurred. His capacity for making mischief was widely recognized.

Once the sociologist has obtained an idea of the prevalent pattern of antagonisms in the village, he can use this knowledge for obtaining better information. Thus the friends of a man will provide one version of events while his enemies provide another version. And there are a number of marginal people who may provide a third version.

For a period of two years after leaving Rampura I was unable to so much as glance at my field-notes. When I finally came round to writing up a few disputes for a field-work class I experienced a certain amount of difficulty in achieving a completely coherent account. This was specially so with the partition disputes which usually ran for a few weeks and involved much acrimonious discussion. Some of my entries were vague or mutually inconsistent, and in the process of producing a coherent account of the dispute, I had to omit, change and reinterpret some parts of my notes. I mentioned this fact in my first published account of a dispute.[3]

Social anthropologists have in recent years stressed the fact that their descriptive monographs are a contribution to history. They claim that these monographs provide better data for future historians of primitive and peasant life in different parts of the world, than are available for any country and for any period in the past. This is no doubt true but it is essential to state that a social anthropologist's note-books occasionally contain entries that are wrong, vague or partial. This is specially true of the data collected in the first few months. When he is writing up, the social anthropologist discards the entries which he knows or suspects to be wrong. But he rarely mentions that his clear and coherent accounts of various aspects of the life of the people he has studied are occasionally produced from notes which are far from clear and consistent.

[3] "A Joint Family Dispute in a Mysore Village," *Journal of the M. S. University of Baroda*, Vol. I, No. 1, 1952, pp. 7-31.

These difficulties exist in all cases excepting where the field-worker has periodically taken time off from the field to read and ponder over his entries and resolves his doubts and difficulties by discussing them with his informants. They are particularly prone to occur where the field-worker is spending a year or less in the field and also when he is recording disputes which occur over several weeks. I am not concerned here with the other limitations of field-notes as historical documents, namely, the subjectivism imposed by the field-worker's interests, his limited energy and the degree of his conscientiousness. It is obvious that where the social anthropologist uses an interpreter, as he frequently does, the notes do not have the same value as when he has enough mastery over the language of the people he is studying.

Recent research has shown that even the genealogies recorded by an anthropologist do not always provide an accurate record of descent. This is especially so in segmentary societies where the genealogies regularly adjust themselves to the dynamics of the lineage system.[4] Even where there is a caste of genealogists whose business it is to record genealogies and bring them up to date periodically, genealogies do not always provide an accurate record of descent at all levels.[5] Generally speaking, the remoter the past, the less reliable are the memories of informants. Even with regard to events which happened a year or two ago, informants' memories are not particularly reliable. But where a large number of people are involved, several can be questioned to obtain an account which is broadly true. And where documents exist, informants can be questioned on the basis of the documents. I used the first technique in gathering facts about a dispute which had occurred in October 1947 between Kere and Bihalli, and the second in my account of the Washerman dispute.

It was while collecting the facts of the dispute among Washermen that the idea occurred to me to look for documents referring to settlement of past disputes. I was told that caste and village headmen in the big villages had such documents. I had no luck, however, with the Peasant Headman of Hogur, the *hobli* to which Rampura belongs, but I fared better with the Peasant Headman

[4] Evans-Pritchard, E. E., *The Nuer*, Oxford, 1940, p. 246.

[5] See A. M. Shah and R. G. Shroff, "A Caste of Genealogists and Mythographers—the Vahivancha Barots of Gujarat", in *Traditional India: Structure and Change*, edited by Milton Singer, Philadelphia, 1959, pp. 40-70.

of Kere, at a distance of three miles from Rampura. In the summer of 1952, I made several trips to him and finally obtained loan of over 70 documents, some of which referred to settlement of disputes which had occurred in Kere Hobli during the year 1900-1940. The documents referred to a wide variety of matters, and I am convinced that where such documents exist, they are invaluable for the study of rural social history. My own analysis of the concept of the dominant caste owed much to these documents. I do know that such documents also exist elsewhere. The people with whom these documents exist do not take enough care to preserve them, and white ants, roaches, rats and the monsoon are steadily diminishing the quantity of documents available to the anthropologist. These remarks also apply to village records lying in the *taluk* offices everywhere. These documents have, somehow, failed to attract the attention of historians in spite of their obvious importance.

The systematic study of disputes in rural areas and their settlement by non-official *panchayats* constitute an important field of research. It is completely neglected at the present moment by sociologists as well as lawyers. The latter confine themselves to laws passed by the State and Central Parliaments. Customary law as observed in the villages is not regarded as law even though it govern the lives of millions. Convenient myths exist to the effect that the introduction of British law destroyed the laws and customs followed by the village *panchayats*. Indian villagers are really 'bi-legal' using both their traditional system as well as British-introduced law administered by the official courts situated in towns. I have been told of cases withdrawn from the latter to be settled before the unofficial *panchayats*. The study of the effects of introduction of British law on the indigenous system and on Indian society needs to be investigated by historians, anthropologists and lawyers. (Dr. Bernard Cohn of Rochester is studying this problem in Uttar Pradesh.)

The concentration on formal and written law has distorted the perspective of Indian lawyers and intellectuals. It has led to even pretending that the law enforced in the unofficial *panchayats* is not law.

I am convinced, however, that the study of the submerged legal system is extremely important and will be one of the things which will have to be undertaken if we plan to develop a much-neglected

field of studies, namely, the sociology of law and legal institutions. Such a study will also throw light on a historico-legal riddle, the relation between the law as embodied in the sacred books of the Hindus and the law as actually observed and obeyed by the bulk of the people living in villages. Finally, the study of this problem is not unrelated to the policy of devolution which finds much vocal support among modern India's leaders.

9. VILLAGE STUDIES AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE

My aim in this essay is to assess the significance of anthropological studies of Indian village communities for other disciplines such as economics, comparative religion and history, and for the practical tasks of social and agricultural reconstruction. I have in view only the really intensive field-studies conducted by trained anthropologists who use the latest techniques and methods. Judged by this standard a good deal of what passes for field-work does not bear examination. I assume that the reader has a layman's acquaintance with social anthropology, and will, therefore, refrain from attempting to give him an idea of the way in which the social anthropologist sets about the task of making an intimate and first-hand study of a small community. It is necessary, however, to state that one of the aims of the social anthropologist in selecting a small community is that he wants to obtain an idea of the way in which all the parts of a society hang together. Even if he is studying only a single aspect of a society such as religion or law he tries to view it in relation to the total social system in which all the aspects are found to be constantly interacting. The field-worker records practically everything he sees even when, for instance, his aim is only to make an analysis of the kinship system of the people he is studying. He will try to collect as much information as he can, in the 12-18 months at his disposal, about the other activities of people such as agriculture, house-building, commercial activities, manners, morals, law and religion. This is partly due to his over-developed sense of curiosity, and partly to his awareness that the various aspects of a society form a closely-woven mesh, and that the particular aspect he is studying might influence and be influenced by every other aspect of social life. The field-worker will have obtained, by the time he has completed his study, an intimate and all-round knowledge of the village or tribe he has been with.

It may be argued that, on his own admission, the anthropologist has knowledge of only one tiny village or tribe, and in dealing with vast countries such knowledge cannot be a reliable guide. But then, systematic comparison is considered to be of the essence of the method of social anthropology. For instance, no anthropologist would dare to speak of Indian villages as a whole until a sufficient

number of villages in the different cultural areas had been studied. Secondly, an anthropologist takes care to see that his village is either typical of an area, or that it is suitable for the study of a particular theoretical problem such as the nature of inter-caste relations, or the effects of irrigation on social and economic institutions, or the relation between religion and the caste structure. And it is necessary to point out that the study of a single village is productive of much more than knowledge about a single village. It is an attempt to answer a general theoretical question by viewing it in relation to a body of self-collected data. In addition, it provides the anthropologist with some insight into rural social life all over the country. Of course, such insight is not knowledge, and once this distinction is clearly made, even a single village study enables the anthropologist to say a good deal about rural social life in India as a whole.

Intensive field-work experience is of critical importance in the career of an anthropologist. It forms the basis of his comprehension of all other societies, including societies differing greatly from the one of which he has first-hand knowledge. No amount of book-knowledge is a substitute for field-experience.

When the anthropologist reads an economist or political scientist or statistician on the country in which he has done an intensive field-study, he cannot help comparing his experience with the economist's or political scientist's or statistician's. The economist, political scientist and statistician usually deal with large areas, or with a great number of people, and their experience is of quite a different kind from that of the anthropologist. With the former, the collector of primary data is frequently different from the expert who interprets it. The 'macrocosmic' studies of the economist and statistician make such a division of labour inevitable, but it is obvious that there are grave risks in making such a division. Firstly, it requires from the collectors of primary data a high level of integrity, intelligence and training, which they only too often do not possess. This is strikingly clear in an underdeveloped country such as ours where the government requires the hereditary village officials like the headman and accountant to collect a vast amount of information on a variety of topics. These officials do not as a rule have either the training or the interest to collect accurate information, and besides, in a majority of cases, they have a vested interest in supplying wrong information. For instance, during wartime

rationing the government was buying up all the surplus food-grains grown by peasants at a fixed rate. The surplus was calculated by the village accountant on the basis of the return declared by each peasant and deducting from it the grain necessary to feed the members of his family, servants and old labourers, and seed-grain. It is well known that the accountants winked at low returns, allowed the peasants to include casual guests as members of the family, and so on. The ill-paid accountant was not unwilling to oblige the peasant for a consideration, and in the case of the powerful landlords, he was eager not to incur their wrath.

Even when graduates have been employed to collect answers to questionnaires devised by some expert in Delhi or beyond, the investigators are able at best to have only a partial grasp of the significance of the questionnaires, as they lack a sound training in social anthropology and sociology.

It is essential that in order to comprehend the significance of the information solicited, the investigators must have a full knowledge of the basic problem that is being investigated, even when it is not a problem in pure theory.

On the other hand, questionnaires can only be compiled after the expert has had some knowledge of the local conditions. The expert frequently lacks such knowledge. These drawbacks could be to some extent remedied where the investigators have been properly trained, and where the expert encourages them to express their opinions freely, but everyone will agree that this is not common.

In the case of anthropological field-studies of village communities, however, the anthropologist both devises the questionnaire and collects the answers, and even where he employs an assistant, he is both physically present in the village and also possesses enough local knowledge to exercise close supervision.

II

We have a government which is solicitous of the welfare of the peasantry, and it is aware, as few governments are, of the need for accurate facts on a variety of matters affecting the peasant, such as the extent of subdivision and fragmentation of holdings, the nature of rural credit, the conditions under which the landless labourers work in different parts of the country, and the extent to which under-employment or disguised unemployment prevails

in the rural areas. It is understandable that the government's aim is severely practical in conducting these surveys. It is not, however, realized that the successful prosecution of that aim requires what may appear to be a departure from the strictly practical. The various aspects of rural social life are closely integrated with each other, and an analysis of any one aspect of social life may, and usually does, involve an analysis of one or more related aspects and their interactions. Thus, for instance, a survey of rural credit cannot ignore the existence of elaborate marriage and funeral rites, and ideas regarding how they ought to be performed. Statistics regarding cattle make no sense if considered without reference to the agricultural techniques and the peasant's economy, and also, to the ethical and religious beliefs of the people. In short, a consideration of each rural problem as though it was detachable from others and from the total social and cultural matrix, will not lead to the formulation of a proper solution. I repeat that it is entirely understandable that the government should want to concern itself only with 'practical research' and that it should aim at producing quick results, but what is not understandable is the failure of anthropologists and sociologists to point out that such aims are bound to defeat themselves. This is to some extent due to the poverty of university departments which are starved of funds for research which make them accept any conditions, however unreasonable, imposed by the government.

In short, only the social anthropologist attempts to study the village community as a whole, and his knowledge and approach provide an indispensable background for the proper interpretation of data on any single aspect of rural social life. His approach provides a much needed corrective to the partial approach of the economist, political scientist and social worker. Again, unlike the other social scientists, he tries hard to keep his value-judgements to himself, and this gives him the necessary sympathy to grasp the rural or tribal situation.

An example will perhaps make clear what I am trying to say. We hear a great deal about India's cattle problem from economists and reformers. We are told that India has the largest cattle population with the smallest milk-yield, that the peasant does not take proper care of his cattle, and that his religious sentiments come in the way of a sensible cattle policy. What light does a study of a single village shed on this matter? The facts which I am about to

relate are from the village of Rampura, about 22 miles to the south-east of Mysore City. It is likely that they also hold good of many other villages around Rampura. In this area, the cow is not as the buffalo from the point of view of milk. It is true that people prefer cow-milk for drinking, and in fact, infants and patients use nothing else, but buffalo-milk is far more popular for making ghee, curd, buttermilk and coffee and tea. Those who sell milk find it easier to dilute buffalo's milk than cow's milk. This situation obtains in other parts of India too. Taking the country as a whole, it is very likely that the buffalo is at least as important as the cow as a producer of milk, though not as a draught animal. But it is extremely strange that in discussions on the cattle problem the buffalo is conspicuous by its absence and that this fact has gone uncommented.

In Rampura—and this is true of a considerable part of India as a whole—the bull buffalo is not used for draught purposes. It is, however, a favourite for sacrificing to village goddesses. A cynic might say that people choose to sacrifice only an utterly useless animal which it would have cost fodder to keep. This may be contrasted with the popular view that Hindus refuse to kill off old and useless cattle because of religious sentiments. In this case, the same sentiments require the slaughter of one kind of cattle.

Bullocks are draught animals in Rampura—and in a great part of India. Practically every cultivator in Rampura keeps a pair of bullocks, while only a few keep a cow or buffalo for milk and manure. This is primarily due to the shortage of pastureland. It is difficult enough to find fodder for bullocks which *have* to be kept, for no land-owner would like to engage a tenant without bullocks of his own and there is keen competition to obtain land to till. Owning a pair of bullocks is a strong qualification in the struggle to obtain land. But the poverty of the peasant forces him to buy the cheapest bullocks available—in 1948 the lowest price for a pair of small bullocks was about Rs. 250. Small bullocks cost less to feed than big ones. The death of a bullock seriously upsets the peasant's economy, and it may be recalled here that the life of a bullock was precarious before veterinary hospitals became common. An epidemic of rinderpest used to wipe out hundreds of cattle. The peasant is aware that he may be suddenly called upon to replace one or both of his bullocks during the middle of the agricultural season. Secondly, ploughs in this area are light, being made of wood, and big bullocks are not needed to draw them.

Thirdly, rice is cultivated in small, ridged-up plots, and bullocks must be small enough to turn in them. Big bullocks confer prestige on the owner. One man in Rampura kept two pairs of very big bullocks, magnificent beasts, but he kept them more for show than for draught purposes. The villagers envied him, but also thought him foolish, for bullocks are meant for use and not to bring glory to their master. This man was a spendthrift, drank toddy, smoked *bhang*, kept mistresses, and his going in for huge bullocks was of a piece with the rest of his thriftless life.

Contrary to the impression obtaining among the urban intelligentsia, the peasants take as much care of their cattle as their resources permit. Bullocks are made to work hard during the monsoon months of June-August, and the peasant feels grateful to them. During September and October, when there is not much work to be done in the fields, the peasant gets up sometime after midnight to hand-feed his sleepy bullocks with green rice shoots. This feeding goes on for a few hours every night. Once I saw a peasant thrusting paddy sheaves into the mouth of a bullock, and I asked him why, when there was acute rice shortage in the cities, he was giving it stuff which could keep human beings alive, and he replied, "Didn't it help me in sowing and transplanting? Why shouldn't it eat a little of what it helps me to grow?" Gratitude is to be shown not only to human beings, but also to cattle. The peasant's world-view, in some respects or contexts, is not anthropocentric. The bull is after all Basava, the son of Shiva, the animal on which the great god Shiva rides. No bullocks may be yoked to the plough on Monday, for Monday is sacred to Shiva, and Shiva's son should be given rest on that day.

A few rich landlords in Rampura kept a few small cows each, for the sake of manure. There is a great shortage of manure and rich landlords try to obtain additional manure by keeping cows. A small boy drives them every morning to some pastureland two miles from the village, and he returns in the evening with the animals. The pasture is poor, but fodder is so scarce that it is worthwhile to collect what is available. The droppings of the cows are collected in a basket and brought home. Cattle-shed manure is emptied on to the manure-heap. A boy costs only about thirty rupees a year plus food and clothing. Each cow is a mobile Sindri, converting the sparse tufts of poor grass into valuable manure. It may be added here that in Rampura cowdung is not burnt for

fuel in spite of the great shortage of fuel. This is due to a rule enforced by the village elders sometime ago—not by the official panchayat, however.

It is commonly believed that the peasant's religious attitude to cattle comes in the way of the disposal of useless cattle. Here again, my experience of Rampura makes me sceptical of the general belief. I am not denying that cattle are regarded as in some sense sacred, but I doubt whether the belief is as powerful as it is claimed to be. I have already mentioned that bull-buffaloes are sacrificed to village goddesses. And in the case of the cow, while the peasant does not want to kill the cow or bull himself he does not seem to mind very much if someone else does the dirty job out of his sight. There are, in this area, itinerant Muslim traders who go from village to village exchanging cattle. The trader exchanges one of the calves in his possession for another in the peasant's possession. Peasant's say that the trader always gets an animal and a few rupees in exchange for the animal that he parts with. The cattle which are finally with the trader end in a butcher's yard in Hogur or Mysore city.

III

Over the last hundred years or more, the peasant has been represented as extremely conservative, pig-headed, ignorant and superstitious. And this picture of him seems to have gained greater currency these days as a result of the many organized efforts, official as well as non-official, to change his agriculture and way of life. The anthropologist who has made an intensive study of a village community is unable to subscribe to the current views regarding the peasant, or at the very least, he has serious modifications to offer to them.

In a paper entitled "Technological Change in Overdeveloped Rural Areas,"[1] McKim Marriott shows that villagers in Kishen Garhi in Uttar Pradesh have not opposed all change, but, on the contrary, have accepted new crops and new techniques of cultivation. What is even more important, he shows that the technology of the peasant is not the simple thing that it is popularly believed to be, but really a complex and inter-related whole, and a change in

[1] *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, Vol. 1, No. 4, 1952, pp. 261-72.

any single item of it produces repercussions in the entire system. The technological system is closely related to the economic, social and religious systems, and this partly explains the peasant's opposition to change. Change is much more serious and pervasive in small and stable societies where the same people are involved with each other in a number of relationships, than in huge, industrial societies where the different aspects of social life do not form as closely-knit a whole, and where relationships between individuals are specialized and disparate.

A desperate shortage characterizes the peasant's economy. He is in need of a few things for sheer survival, and each of these multipurpose goods is in acute shortage. To give an example: the peasant has several uses for each leaf and twig growing in his area. *Euphorbia* is excellent for hedging, it is burnt as fuel when dry, and if it is buried underground when green, makes good manure. Similarly, *agave* is good for hedging, its leaves are used to protect new mud walls during the monsoon, and to protect nurseries, and it provides fibre for rope. Its central shoot is burnt as fuel. Every part of the ubiquitous *babul*, including the two-inch thorns, are put to use. Its twigs are used for hedging, its leaves and pods are eaten by the omnivorous goat, its wood is used as timber and fuel, short lengths of *babul* twigs are used as tooth brushes, its thorns as pins, and its fragrant flowers to adorn women's hair and to make garlands. The popularity of the goat is a measure of the shortage of fodder. Its omnivorousness enables it to survive even in our over-stocked countryside, and its survival makes silviculture extremely difficult if not impossible.

The peasant uses cowdung as fuel not because he does not know that it is valuable manure, but because he is desperately short of fuel. His plough is wooden and light because his bullocks are small, and often, he has to grow his crop on a few inches of topsoil above hard rock. He spends money at weddings and funerals because if he does not do so he loses face with his relatives, friends and neighbours. It is not fair to hold him responsible for institutions which have existed for several centuries. He can only be blamed for not having the courage to break them, and going against custom is much more difficult in the small, face-to-face and stable village community than in the heterogeneous and huge city. His poverty and inability makes him dependent on others and this in turn forces him to conform.

The conservatism of the peasant is not without reason. His agricultural techniques are a prized possession embodying as they do the experience of centuries. His social and cultural institutions give him a sense of security and permanence, and he is naturally loth to change them. It may be added here that conservatism is not peculiar to peasantry—nobody likes change especially when he is past his youth. It is the experience of field-workers that in every village there are a few young men who like to alter their traditional ways, but they are in the grip of the authority of the elders. Nowadays, in many villages, a sharp conflict is visible between the elders and youths. The youths have not made much headway in capturing power because respect for elders is strongly emphasized in their tradition, and the institutions of joint family and village panchayat tend to protract the dependence, economic and otherwise, of the young men on the old. Thus, changing an item of agricultural technique is not merely a technological matter, but one affecting social relations between father and son, and between elders and youths, and in a sense the integrity of the entire culture which emphasizes respect for the old as a primary value.

The peasant's conservatism makes him sceptical of new ways and techniques. He is unconvinced by the success of a variety of rice on a government farm because he knows that his own resources are pitiful while the government's are enormous. Not infrequently is he a jump ahead of the expert for he has already calculated the effect of a new idea or tool on the power-structure in the village. Thus while the expert is elaborating the advantages of a new tool or process, the peasant is thinking of the power it will place in the hands of the headman or elders. If he then opposes the tool or process, it is not because of his stupidity but because of his intelligence. I have seen with my own eyes how the gift by the government of a superior breed of bull-calf to a village was used by the headman to exercise tyrannical authority over a poor and unfortunate kinsman to whom he gave the calf. Every new tool or technique means changes in social relationships and part of the opposition of villagers to new tools and techniques is due to their perception of the social implications of the innovations. Thus the headman of Rampura wanted bull-dozers and electricity but not a school. Bull-dozers would level his land, electricity would brighten up the home and village and make possible starting small industries, while schools would make labour even scarcer,

and the poor people lose the respect they have for the rich. Everyone who has had any experience of our villages knows that in each village there are a few key men whose position in the structure, and whose intelligence will enable them to exploit every change to their benefit. This fact has to be taken note of while introducing every measure of reform.

IV

A vast body of literature, sacred as well as secular, is available to the student of Indian social institutions, and the existence of this literature has exercised a decisive influence on the analysis of Indian sociological problems. For instance, references to caste and kin relations in literature have been treated as historical data, and conditions obtaining today have been compared and contrasted with conditions alleged to prevail in historical times. The law books (*Dharmasutras* and *Dharmashāstras*) have been assumed to refer to laws which were actually in force among the people and it has not been asked whether the laws did not refer to merely what a particular lawyer considered desirable or good. Even for the major lawyers it is not known when exactly they lived, it being not uncommon for one scholar's estimate to differ from another's by as much as three centuries. This is especially so in the case of the earlier lawyers. Dr. I. P. Desai writes, "A further difficulty in the development of Hindu law is the lack of agreement among scholars regarding the dates of various works .... There is no agreement regarding the time sequence (of the various authors). Buhler considers Gautama as the earliest Dharmasastrakar and Apastamba as the latest, while Jayaswal reverses the order, considering Apastamba as the earliest and Gautama as the latest Dharmasastrakar."[2] The provenance of a lawyer, and the sanction behind the rules enunciated by him are frequently far from clear if not unknown.

It is pertinent to mention in this connection that there is, among our educated people, an unstated but nonetheless real and deep-seated assumption that what is written is true, and the older a manuscript, the more true its contents. Learning is almost synonymous with pouring over palm leaf manuscripts. This bias in

[2] "Punishment and Penance in Manusmriti," *Journal of the University of Bombay*, Vol. XV, Part I, July, 1946, p. 42.

favour of literary and antiquarian material is most clearly seen in the syllabuses of Indological studies in our universities. Indology has come to be regarded as knowledge about India's past. Any suggestion that Indology should include the study of tribes and villages which are in existence today would be regarded as too absurd to merit consideration. Caste in the Vedas and in Manu ought to be studied but caste as a powerful force in modern Indian life ought not to be. Indology and archaeology are also mixed up with the desire to glorify India's past, an attitude not conducive to scholarly detachment.

The observation of social behaviour is everywhere a difficult undertaking and, in certain respects, observing one's own society is far more difficult than observing an alien society. In the case of Indians, there is the additional difficulty that ideas which are carried over from literary material, and from the caste and region to which one belongs by birth, vitiate the observation of field-behaviour. An example of such a failure to understanding the factual situation is provided by the way in which the idea of *varna* has vitiated the understanding of caste. According to the *varna* scheme, there are only four castes and a few other groups, while as a matter of actual fact there are, in each linguistic area, several hundred castes, each of which is a homogeneous group, with a common culture, with a common occupation or occupations, practising endogamy and commensality. The castes of a local area form a hierarchy. There are several features of this hierarchy which run counter to the hierarchy as it is conceptualised in the idea of *varna*. Firstly, in the *varna* scheme, there are only four all-India castes each of which occupies a definite and immutable place, while, in caste at the existential level, the only definite thing is that all the local castes form a hierarchy. Everything else is far from certain. For one thing, the hierarchy is characterized by uncertainty, especially in the middle region which spans an enormous structural gulf. Each caste tries to argue that it occupies a higher place than the one allotted to it by its neighbours. This arguability has an important function because it makes possible mobility, and castes are mobile over a period of time. There is an occasional leap-frogging inside the system, a caste jumping over its neighbours to achieve a higher position. Another important point is that the hierarchy is local, varying from one small local area to another, if not from one village to another. Two groups bearing the same name and

living in the same linguistic region often occupy different positions in their respective local hierarchies and differ from each other in some customs and rites. The Kolis of Gujarat are a case in point.

It is clear that the idea of *varna* is far too rigid and simple to cover the immensely complex facts of caste. But the idea of *varna* helps to make the facts of caste in one region intelligible all over India by providing a conceptual frame that is simple, clear-cut, stable, and which, it is imagined, holds good everywhere. And it helps mobility too, for ambitious castes find it less difficult to take on high-sounding Sanskritic names with the name of one of the *varnas* as a suffix, than to take on the name of a local higher caste. But all this is lost sight of because *varna* is treated as describing caste accurately and fully. But this would not have happened if educated Indians had not assumed that the idea of *varna* adequately explained the facts of the caste system. The only cure for this marked literary bias lies in doing field-research. The field-worker, confronted by the bewildering variety and complexity of facts as they actually are, is forced to relate what he sees to what he has assumed it to be, and the lack of correspondence between the two results in his attempting to reassess the written material.

V

In every part of India only a few castes at the top enjoyed a literary tradition while the bulk of the people did not. Under British rule the top castes supplied the intelligentsia which acted as the link between the new masters and the bulk of the people. And the new intelligentsia saw the social reality through the written literature, regarding deviations from the latter as aberrations. This group also perpetrated an upper-caste view of the Hindu social system on the new masters and through them, the outside world. Conditions prevalent among the upper castes were generalized to include all Hindus. For instance, women are treated much more severely among the higher castes than among the lower, but this distinction was ignored by the early reformers. They talked about the plight of the Hindu widow, the absence of divorce, the harshness of the sex code towards her and so on, but on all these matters the institutions of the lower castes differ in important respects from those of the higher castes. The point I am trying to make is that the observation of Hindu social life has been, and still is, vitiated by the book-

view and the upper-caste-view. A sociological study of Indian sociologists would yield interesting results.

An emphasis on religious behaviour as such, as distinguished from what is written in the religious books and the opinions of the upper castes, would have provided us with a view of Hinduism substantially different from that of the philosophers, Sanskritists and reformers. I shall try to explain what I mean by an example. In the summer of 1948, I went along with the elders of Rampura village to the temple of the deity Basava to watch them consult the deity about rain. The priest performed *puja*, chanting *mantras* in Sanskrit, and then the elders began to ask the deity to let them know whether it was going to rain or not in the next few days. I was expecting them to behave as I have seen devotees behave in the temples of the upper castes, viz., stand with bowed head and folded palms, shut eyes, and utter words showing great reverence for, and fear of, and dependence upon, the deity. I was completely taken aback to find them using words which they used to an equal, and a somewhat unreasonable equal at that. They became angry, shouted at the deity, taunted him, and went so far as to say that they considered even the government more worthy of confidence than him. And they were deadly serious all the time. Nothing could have been further from an urban and educated Hindu's ideas of what the proper relationship was between man and god.

It is frequently said by apologists and reformers that Hinduism is not a proselytizing religion like Christianity and Islam. This again is not strictly true. Besides the Buddhists and Jains, the Lingayats, who began as a militant reformist sect in the South in the twelfth century A.D., secured converts from all the castes from the Brahmin to the Untouchable in the early days of their history. The Lingayats are a well-organized sect, and they have monasteries scattered all over Karnatak. In southern Mysore, for instance, the monasteries have a following not only among Lingayats but also among a number of middle-range non-Brahminical castes with whom they are in continuous contact, and over whose life they exercise some kind of direction. The head of each monastery collects a levy from each of his followers through a hierarchy of agents. It is important to note that this is not confined to the Lingayats though they are the best-organized of the sects. The Brahmin devotees of the great theologian and reformer, Sri Ramanujacharya, have a monastery at Melkote, about 26 miles from Mysore City,

and the monastery has a following among the people in the surrounding towns and villages. Thus, both Brahmin and non-Brahmin sects have deeply influenced the people at large through organizations which have existed for hundreds of years. Still one frequently reads in books on Hindu religion and philosophy that Hinduism is unique in that it is not a proselytising religion. It is true that Hindus do not try to convert Christians or Muslims, but in a sense conversion is going on all the time within Hinduism. The lower castes and tribal people have been undergoing Sanskritization all the time, and sects, Brahminical and non-Brahminical and Vaishnavite and Shaivite, have actively sought converts. Persecution for religious views and practices has not been unknown.

VI

The studies of village communities which are currently being carried out in different parts of the country provide the future historian with a vast body of facts about rural social life, facts collected not by travellers in a hurry, but by men who are trained to observe keenly and accurately. These studies constitute therefore valuable contributions to the social, political, economic and religious history of our country. Their value is further enhanced when it is realized that the changes which are being ushered in Independent and Plan-conscious India herald a complete revolution in our social life. It is true that in historic times India has been subject to invasions by diverse peoples including the Mughals and the British, and that British rule inaugurated changes the fulfilment of which we are observing now, but the break with the past was never as complete and thoroughgoing as it is today. We have, at the most, another ten years in which to record facts about a type of society which is changing fundamentally and with great rapidity.

Historians have often claimed that a knowledge of the past is helpful in the understanding of the present if not in forecasting the future. It is not, however, realized that a thorough understanding of the present frequently sheds light on the past. To put it in other words, the intimate knowledge which results from the intensive field-survey of extant social institutions does enable us to interpret better, data about past social institutions. Historical data are neither as accurate nor as rich and detailed as the data collected by field-anthropologists, and the study of certain existing processes increases

our understanding of similar processes in the past. It is necessary to add here that great caution has to be exercised in such a task, for otherwise history will be twisted out of all recognition. But once the need for extreme caution is recognized, there is no doubt that our knowledge of the working of historical processes will be enhanced by this method. For instance, the study of the extant institution of feud in certain African societies has enabled anthropologists to conclude that the classical view of the feud as it obtained among the ancient Anglo-Saxons perhaps needs to be changed in important respects.[2] It is probable that the study of factions as it obtains in an Indian village today will shed light on local political history.

Enough has been said, I hope, to indicate the importance of the intensive study of villages which are at present being made in different parts of India. To the anthropologist the villages are invaluable observation-centres where he can study in detail social processes and problems to be found occurring in many parts of India, if not in a great part of the world. An anthropologist goes to live in a village for a year or even two not because he wants to collect information about curious and dying customs and beliefs, but to study a theoretical sociological problem, and his most important aim is to contribute to the growing body of theoretical knowledge about the nature of human societies. The success of welfare work is considerably helped, indirectly, by the growth of this theoretical knowledge. The universities are the proper organizations to conduct this research, and the government can help by giving money to the establishment of teaching and research posts in social anthropology and sociology. Too much stress on utilitarian research will defeat itself, and will further lower intellectual standards in our universities.

I may now mention a few of the problems that are either being studied, or have just been studied, by anthropologists in the last ten years. One anthropologist is making a study of the effects of the introduction of irrigation, and commercial crops, on what was formerly a predominantly 'dry' village. A sugar factory was put up in this area in the thirties, and the village in question grows some sugarcane for the factory. A study of this village should also help to throw some light on the effects of the introduction of a cash

[2] Max Gluckman, "Political Institutions," *Institutions of Primitive Society*, Edited by E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Oxford, 1954, pp. 74-5.

economy and urbanization on rural social institutions. Another anthropologist has made a study of the effects of peasant economy in Orissa. Yet another has studied a multi-caste village in Gujarat in which genealogical records, going back to about two hundred years at least, are available for each of the principal castes. Here the aim is to study the effects, if any, of the presence of a written or historical tradition on the institutions and beliefs of a peasant community. My own aim in making a study of Rampura in the year 1948 was to get a detailed description of the way in which each of the nineteen caste groups behaved towards the others. I must confess I was a bit tired of reading about caste in general, and it may come as a surprise to some to know that in spite of the great interest in the institution of caste, no one had seen fit to go and live in a multi-caste village and record in detail the inter-actions between the various castes. I also wanted to find out the relation which the caste system bore to the pattern of land-ownership in the village. My study has convinced me of the enormous value of studying Indian sociological problems in single villages. I do not say that all sociological problems can be studied in the village. But those that can be studied in single villages or in small clusters of neighbouring villages will yield rich insights into Indian social life.

10. SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE STUDY OF RURAL AND URBAN SOCIETIES

During the last hundred years social anthropology has concentrated on the study of 'primitive' societies even though it has not entirely excluded from its purview non-primitive societies. Classical Greece and Rome, ancient India, China, and Egypt have received the attention of such anthropologists as Morgan, Maine, Robertson-Smith Frazer, Fustel de Coulanges, Mauss and Huber. These men studied sociological problems, though in an evolutionary or historical setting. Sir Henry Maine, for instance, made a comparative study of the relation between law and religion, and the effect of codification on legal institutions in Ancient Greece, Rome, and India.

Social anthropology is as much characterized by the method which it pursues as by its subject-matter. The method is intensive field-work (or 'participant observation' as some prefer to call it). Lewis H. Morgan was the first scholar to undertake a field-study of a primitive people: his account of the "League of the Iroquois" is a product of field-work done before 1851. Franz Boas undertook a field-trip to Baffin Land in 1883-4, and A.C. Haddon led the Cambridge Expedition to the Torres Straits in 1898.

The field-work tradition gradually became established in the subject, and nowadays, a social anthropologist needs to have done intensive field-work at least in one society if not two. (In this respect social anthropology offers a contrast to the other social sciences). Insistence on field-work has had a profound effect on the character and growth of the subject. Firstly, the subject has its feet firmly planted on the ground; secondly, theoretical propositions must be referred to a body of ethnographic data, either the result of one's own or another's field-work. Theoretical conclusions, formulated by others are developed further by applying them to a body of intensive data collected by the anthropologist himself. For instance, ideas regarding the relation between religion and society first propounded by Durkheim when analysing the religious life of the Australian aborigines, were developed further by Radcliffe-Brown in his work on the Andaman Islanders. Durkheim himself was influenced by Robertson-Smith. Similarly, Evans-Pritchard's

interpretation of Azande witchcraft owes something to Levy-Bruhl's ideas on 'primitive mentality'.

Theoretical development has led to better fieldwork and *vice versa*. Over the last fifty years there has been a continuous effort to get deeper and newer kinds of data to answer the needs of developing theory. Now almost everyone agrees that a few weeks or months with a people, through interpreters and a few selected informants cannot provide a reliable or intimate view of the people studied. An anthropologist is expected to spend at least 12-18 months among the people he studies, to master their language, and to observe as much as he can. As Professor Barnes has said, "recent field-workers tend to make much greater use of the people they study as actors than did their predecessors."[1]

The British school of social anthropology now emphasizes not culture but society, social structure, and social relations, and this has had a profound effect on the kind of data gathered. In the good old days an anthropologist obtained from one or a few informants information about the customs and rules in force among the people he was studying. Nowadays he obtains, in addition, information regarding the extent to which the customs and rules are actually observed, and the penalties attached to their violation. He also tries to find out whether some customs and rules are obeyed more than others, and whether this is associated with other factors such as class, caste, religion, kinship and age. Above all, he tries to observe in actual field situations the respect or the lack of it accorded to different customs and rules, the comments made by various people, and so on.

Most American anthropologists have an interest in culture and personality and this has resulted in their paying considerable attention to the process of child-rearing especially in the first few years of an infant's life. A great deal of data is nowadays recorded which would have gone unnoticed before. 'Culture and Personality' is now almost a distinct branch of anthropology.

Another feature which has distinguished social anthropology from the beginning is its faith in the 'comparative method'. The great progress made by the subject in the last hundred years has led to a change in the very conception of 'comparative method.' It is indeed a far cry from the 'comparative method' as practised

[1] See J. A. Barnes, "Social Anthropology in Theory and Practice" in *Arts, the Proceedings of the Sydney University Arts Association*, Vol. I, 1958, pp. 47-67.

by Maine and McLennan to Radcliffe-Brown's *The Social Organization of Australian Tribes*, and from Morgan's *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity in the Human Family* to *The African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*. Firstly, modern anthropologists, unlike their forbears, are chary of undertaking comparative studies which include all societies, ancient, mediaeval and modern, and from every part of the world. The data at the disposal of modern anthropologists is immense, and one man, however industrious, cannot master more than a small portion of it. Modern anthropologists are—and can afford to be—far more critical of their sources than their forbears. Also, modern anthropologists tend to restrict comparisons to relatively homogeneous areas, and they prefer to undertake such comparisons in areas of which they have some first-hand experience. It is obvious that it is less complicated to compare societies or institutions within a broadly homogeneous area than those from entirely different culture-areas.

Some would argue that all understanding of another society is necessarily comparative, in as much as an anthropologist understands the society he is studying only by comparing and contrasting it with his own society, even though this comparison is never verbalized. When an anthropologist has made a field-study of a community, he has two communities to fall back upon, the one into which he is born and the other which he has studied. Gradually, as his acquaintance, first- or second-hand, with other societies increases, his approach becomes more truly comparative. Without this, he fails to have sufficient detachment from his own society, or from the one in which he has carried out his field-work.

Most people believe that the comparative method is effective, but a minority argue that comparisons undertaken with a view to arriving at general laws are bound to lead to frustration. This does not mean, however, that they regard comparison as useless. On the contrary, their contention is that while systematic comparison does increase the anthropologists' understanding of the institution or institutional complex in question, such understanding cannot be translated into general laws. They argue that the institutions of a society are so closely knit together that the abstraction of a single institution from its total matrix is bound to lead to distortion. Part of the significance, if not the identity, of an institution consists in the way it is integrated with the other institutions of the society of which it is a part. Thus two institutions, however similar they may

appear, are not identical, since each forms a unique combination with the other institutions in the society of which it is a part. The less sophisticated anthropologists tend to see institutions very much as a mechanic sees the parts of a motor car.

Because the social anthropologist knows only too well that the institutions of a society are inter-related, even when he is studying only a single institution, he gathers information about all the other institutions. He records practically everything that he sees and hears. Someone has described this method as 'Grab All'. It is no wonder that this method leads to the accumulation of a vast body of data, and a year's field-work usually means ten years' writing up. If an anthropologist undertakes two research-projects he will spend the major part of his working life writing up his notes. His notes become a burden on his conscience and he is unhappy whether he spends his time on or away from them. In the former case he neglects the works of his predecessors and colleagues: in the latter he fails in his duty to posterity. Some American scholars have found a solution by mimeographing and circulating their notes. This may be a necessary compromise, but it is not as good as when the field-worker writes a monograph. A man's notes can stimulate him to recalling other facts which he has not recorded, and there are many gaps which only he can fill. Others, however brilliant, do not have the same field-experience, without which interpretation is seriously handicapped.

II

In the thirties, a few social anthropologists studied village communities in such civilized countries as China, Japan, Ireland and Canada. Professor Lloyd Warner made a study of a small town in Massachusetts. Social anthropologists consider that their field of study embraces all societies, primitive, modern and historical, in every part of the world. This is perhaps inevitable in a world in which 'primitive' people are fast ceasing to be primitive.

Studies of village communities which are part of wider societies and which have historical records going back to remote antiquity, promise rich rewards. Scholarship with regard to these countries has until recently been dominated by antiquarians, philologists, archaeologists, historians, classical scholars, Arabists, Sanskritists and Sinologists. The world owes a great debt to their devoted

labours. But their view of the particular country they studied and its culture was chiefly derived from books, sacred and secular, and from monuments and inscriptions. Even information about social institutions of the people has been culled from ambiguous hymns, fanciful myths, and the conflicting utterances of cloistered lawyers and commentators. In particular, a firm chronology is not available for much of the literary material on ancient and mediaeval India. In the case of the legal works, it is not clear where the author hailed from, and what relation the laws he was advocating bore to the customs and laws actually observed by the people in towns and villages. Did the king try to enforce uniform laws throughout his kingdom? What was the relation between the king and the lawyers?

In India there has been a concentration of scholarly attention on the written literature and this has been responsible for the coming into existence of a 'book-view' of Indian society and culture. This view has gained the acceptance of educated Indians. They see the field-situation through pre-conceived ideas: concentration on *varna* has made them miss the complexity and multiplicity of *jati* and of the relation between the two. A too simple, rigid and immutable a view of Hindu society has emerged as a result.

The book-view has also given rise to pseudo-historical explanations of Hindu institutions. Thus pollution ideas found in any caste group are attempted to be explained by reference to what is found in Manu or other lawgiver. There is also an implicit assumption that what is found in a caste is derived from, or is a corrupt form of, what is found in the sacred books. The greater the correspondence to ideas in the sacred books, the 'purer' the institution of the group. Actually, the question of the relation between ongoing institutions of different sections of the people and what is found in the books is an open one and deserves systematic study.

The intensive study of the institutions of different groups in the country provides an antidote to the book-view. It emphazises the diversity and complexity of Indian society and its divergence from the book-model. Indologists will eventually have to readjust their view of Indian society.

Intensive studies of little communities using the techniques and concepts of modern social anthropology have already begun to yield useful tools for analysing the social life and culture of India as a whole. If I may refer to my own work, the concept of Sans-

kritization and the division of Hinduism into All-India, Peninsular, Regional, and Local forms, which were developed in my study of Coorg religion and society, have been found useful in the analysis of other areas in India, and of other, wider, problems. It is not unlikely that they may prove useful even in the analysis of historical data. In a country such as India the 'little community' is a part not only of a big state but also of a 'great tradition', and analysis of the former will provide valuable insights into the latter, insight which perhaps cannot be secured in any other way.

The concept of the 'dominant caste', which again emerged from intensive field-work in a small community, seems to be important for the analysis of problems at wider and higher levels. It may also help in understanding regional political history, power-relations in modern India, and other similar problems.

The village studies have high-lighted the importance of certain extant records which are indispensable for the analysis of rural social life, but which have so far failed to attract the attention of Indian historians and archivists. They include the official village and *taluk* records. Field-workers today urgently need a handbook describing the various records available in each region. Besides official records, village and caste headmen in many parts of India have with them records relating to the settlement of disputes and other matters. These need to be collected and preserved and made available to research-workers. Yet another kind of documents lie with professional genealogists and bards. The field-anthropologist's study of the institutions of peasants make him sensible of the value of these documents. His field-work needs to be supplemented by the study of the available local records, official as well as non-official. The latter give depth and perspective to the field-study. There is no field-worker who has not felt that his analysis would have improved vastly if he had had good local history at his disposal. On the other hand, field-work provides insights into local history.

III

Social anthropologists have shown, until recently, a shyness to study urban problems. But in the last six or seven years a few social anthropologists, Indian as well as foreign, have undertaken field-studies of towns and factories. Here is obviously a rich field

for investigation by the intensive method of social anthropology. Next to nothing is known about the social background of industrial workers in different parts of India. To what extent do linguistic, territorial, caste and kin ties operate in a modern factory? What are the changes which caste undergoes in towns, and what kind of continuity, if any, obtains between it and caste in rural areas? Does the joint family 'disappear' or undergo modifications in towns? Can we pinpoint the differences between traditional towns, (e.g., an old capital of a Raja or a pilgrim-centre) and modern towns? Sometimes it is found that a factory is situated in a traditional town. Does this bring into existence any new patterns of social relationship, and if it does, what is their relation to the traditional patterns? How far are caste, kin, language, religion and other bonds relevant in determining the settlement pattern of a town, in commercial enterprise, in the trade union and co-operative movement, and in politics and education? How far can it be assumed that the social forces which are operative in Western towns are also operative in Indian towns? The ethnography of Indian urban life is conspicuous by its absence.

The main difficulty with intensive field-work is that it yields best results only when the community is sufficiently small to be investigated by a single worker in the course of a year or two. It is obvious that this method will have to be modified or supplemented with others if it has to be extended to the study of big towns or large areas or to historical problems. There is at present an undesirable dichotomy between the study of small communities and the study of towns and macrocosmic problems. The intensive method is employed in the former, and questionnaires, case studies and statistical techniques in the latter. Such a dichotomy is unhealthy, and if social anthropology is to be extended to the study of towns and of macrocosmic problems, it cannot afford to rest content with the intensive method. On the other hand, the use of questionnaires etc., to the exclusion of the intensive method, will result in superficiality, if not in misinterpretation. The employment of different techniques in study microcosmic and macrocosmic problems has resulted in erecting an undesirable barrier in what is, after all, a single field of studies. The French sociologists led by Durkheim recognised this fact and Durkheim himself studied the religion of Australian tribesmen as well as suicide in Europe. Marcel Mauss studied gift-exchange in primitive, ancient, and modern societies.

Social anthropologists should welcome the current tendency to quantify data wherever necessary, and a knowledge of elementary statistical techniques should be regarded as part of an anthropologist's normal equipment. They should also realize that there is a vast range of problems where the intensive method is either not applicable at all or needs to be supplemented with other techniques. Teams, intra-disciplinary as well as inter-disciplinary, have to be employed in the study of some problems.

It is necessary, however, to stress that unless much careful thought goes into the planning of a project to be undertaken by a team and to the selection of personnel, team-work is more or less foredoomed to failure. The men who constitute a team should know each other fairly well, and it should be understood by one and all that working together in the field imposes much strain on everyone. The members of the team should have spent some time together before going to the field, and while in the field, frequent discussions are essential. Success is even more difficult for an inter-disciplinary team. Ordinarily when several specialists come together at a meeting, their failure to communicate with each other is more pronounced than their success.

I am deliberately emphasizing the difficulties involved in teamwork as I do not find sufficient appreciation of them. What one finds prevalent instead is both a cavalier as well as a cynical attitude towards teamwork. Teams are launched at short notice, no care is given to the selection of the personnel, and there is no awareness of the kind of problem that will crop up when several people, some of them mutual strangers, work together. A team is often launched not because the problem needs a team, but because it is believed, perhaps rightly, that Foundations favour teams, especially inter-disciplinary ones, in preference to one-man projects. A problem is often selected not because it is important but because it is likely to find Foundation support. Social anthropologists will then choose only those problems for which they can obtain financial support from the Government or a Foundation or an international organisation. In effect, only problems having a practical bearing are chosen. But problems having a practical importance may not be important theoretically. This will force social anthropology—and other social sciences as well—to become the handmaiden of social work. Some people may welcome such a prospect, but I for one hold that the ultimate aim of social anthro-

pology is to advance our knowledge of how human societies work and change, irrespective of the practical use such knowledge will be put to.

Until recently, social anthropologists have displayed shyness towards the quantification of data and the application of statistical techniques in their field-work. This has been due partly to the fact that the peoples studied were primitives who neither remembered nor recorded the dates of such events as birth, marriage, divorce and death. (Even peasants in many parts of India cannot recall the dates of important events in their lives. One of the first things an investigator has to do is to construct a local chronology on the basis of important local events like flood, famine or a big man's death.) Again, since until the late twenties British and American anthropologists were either evolutionists or diffusionists, there was no inducement to quantify. It is only when concepts of function and structure became central to social anthropology, that need for quantification began to be felt. Thus while formerly it was enough to say that in two different societies there was a preference for marrying mother's brother's daughter, nowadays an anthropologist would try to find out how many of the total number of marriages in either society are with mother's brothers' daughters. He would find out in how many cases the daughters of own brothers of the mother were married and in how many the daughters of classificatory brothers were married. He would also try to find out the force or sanctions behind this form of marriage. He would collect case histories of violation of this rule, and record the discussions which then occurred between the parties and among the arbitrators. He would try to relate this form of marriage to the other features of the kinship system, and the latter to the inclusive social system. Nowadays, a social anthropologist carries out a census of people, live-stock, houses and, less frequently, of occupations. Without the first, no meaningful statement can be made about the family and residence patterns of the people he is studying. These patterns are related to other factors such as income, occupation, and caste. In short, with social anthropology becoming definitely sociological in its orientation, the need for quantification has been felt. And with the extension of the field of social anthropology to the study of large villages, towns, factories, and even regions, statistical techniques will have to be increasingly employed. As mentioned earlier, a knowledge of elementary statistical techniques

should be regarded as part and parcel of the equipment of a social anthropologist.

While the tendency to quantification as well as the employment of statistical techniques is to be welcomed wholeheartedly, it is to be hoped that this will not lead to the belief that everything can be measured and that only those things which can be measured are worthwhile. For many years to come, to say the least, our best insights into social life may come from work which does not involve the use of statistics.

The increasing use of questionnaires is to be welcomed, especially in intensive studies. The use of a questionnaire does not necessarily mean that the investigator goes to the respondent questionnaire in hand, and writes down answers in his presence. The investigator might carry the questionnaire in his head, and often, this may ensure better results than waving it before the respondent. The questionnaire, drawn up by one who knows the art of asking questions, and administered by someone who has a grounding in social anthropology and is conscientious and tactful, is a legitimate weapon in the armoury of the social anthropologist. But the widespread tendency to rely entirely on it, and to use lengthy questionnaires—I came across one which was over 125 pages long!—administered by investigators lacking sufficient training, is nothing short of a disaster. I know that in one part of rural India the sight of the callow investigator armed with an immense questionnaire rolled up like an umbrella, caused panic among peasants who with peasant-guile found means of escaping the new torture. The investigator is usually under pressure to complete so many schedules per day and this results in haste if not in downright dishonesty. And, frequently, data collected in this manner goes into our official handbooks and reports. Policy-makers as well as social scientists depend on such data. It is high time we had a committee of social scientists drawn from different disciplines to go into the question of the degree of reliability of the various kinds of statistical data incorporated in our official publications. Any development programme based on doubtful statistics is bound to cause much unnecessary suffering and frustration.

It is necessary in this connection to mention certain recent developments in India which should make every social scientist apprehensive about the future. While agreeing that research is a normal part of a university teacher's duties, one cannot but be concerned about

the kind of research done in the social sciences and the manner of doing it. Firstly, and most pernicious of all, is the fact that university teachers do not any longer pursue a problem because it is intrinsically important and interesting. The problems on which university teachers are working seem to have been given to them by one or other agency of the Government of India, or a State Government, or a foreign colleague. More frequently than not, *the 'problem' is not a problem in an intellectual sense but only in an administrative sense.* I grant that it is supremely important for public health that our rural people should use lavatories, but I do not think that this problem is important in a theoretical sense. Until recently very little money has been available for the social sciences and this may be a reason why social scientists feel that any research is better than none. But to leave the initiative in formulating problems for research to non-academic bodies will be disastrous for the growth of social sciences. It is indeed tragic that very few seem to regard this state of affairs as unusual and unhealthy. In fact, there is a certain complacency which suggests that the implications of the present trend are not widely realised. Or does the truth lie in the fact that Indian social scientists are not really creative and that they are pleased when someone considers that they can be put to useful work?

There is also emerging a new type of research-structure. At the top of the pyramid sits the director of a research project, usually an academic entrepreneur able to secure funds from some organization or from the Government. Beneath him is a deputy director actually in charge of the project. Below him is a superintendent to draft questionnaires and to analyse the data, and to write the report under the supervision of the deputy director. Finally, there are the hewers of wood and drawers of water, the investigators (sometimes divided into 'junior' and 'senior') who do the 'dirty' work of actual investigation. They are either M.A. or Ph.D. students, and they have to do what they are told. The deputy director usually takes the chair at conferences except on those rare occasions when the director himself is free to attend. The director is normally too busy with more important matters. Finally, the report is written in six months or less—it is indeed a mercy that many reports do not go beyond the mimeograph stage.

No social scientist who cares for the healthy growth of the social sciences in India can remain a mere spectator of what is happening

today. There is no doubt whatever that something akin to Gresham's Law is operating in research, just as Parkinson's Law is operating in social science departments and institutes. Under these conditions no work of distinction and originality is likely to emerge in the near future in social anthropology or in any other social science. Gone indeed are the poverty-stricken but leisurely years, when a scholar could pursue his own interest, in academic obscurity, unknown to planners, politicians, and welfare workers. .

11. HINDUISM

Some difficulties in the way of understanding a religion as amorphous and complex as Hinduism need first to be examined. Hinduism lacks a "church" and a clearly defined body of dogma, and, at first sight, there seems to be no way of becoming a Hindu except through birth into one of the numerous Hindu castes. Yet, in its spread across the Indian sub-continent, Hinduism has absorbed many groups, and proselytizing of a kind has been going on all the time. Hinduism is rich in contradictions: although it has a bias towards pantheism, Hindus worship countless deities for a variety of reasons. It is usual to extol the deity who is being worshipped at the moment above all other deities. A story from one or another of the sacred books called the *puranas* is narrated to "prove" such superiority. In the case of the chief sects, however, there is what may be described as long term henotheism (belief in one God without claiming that he is the only god)—the Shaivites regard Shiva as superior to the other gods, and especially to Vishnu, his chief rival, and *vice versa*. But both Shaivite and Vaishnavite Brahmins utter in their daily *sandhya* prayers a stanza which may be translated as follows: "Just as all rain dropping from the sky ultimately reaches the ocean, so the obeisance made to each god reaches Keshava ultimately." But even the great gods of Hinduism, Shiva and Vishnu, are in the final analysis only manifestations of the supreme, attributeless Brahman (neuter). Hindus do not regard these different beliefs as mutually contradictory, and theologians reconcile them by making each view of God relative to a particular stage of growth and temperament, individual or collective. Objectively, however, we find here only one of the many instances of the ability of Hinduism to accommodate different views of God, while at the same time no doubt is left as to which is the truer view.

Students of Hinduism could be divided into two groups, according as they have relied mainly on the literary sources, or on their own observation of the religious life of the people. The former again fall into two groups: those whose view of Hinduism is derived from the Upanishads, *Bhagavadgita*, and the writings of the three great *acharyas* (teachers), Shankara, Ramanuja and Madhva, and their followers—in short, the avowedly philosophical works—or on

popular literature—the epics, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, the *puranas* and the folk-tales. European scholars who came into contact with Hindu philosophical thought found in it much to admire, and this attitude had a marked effect on the new Indian intelligentsia. This attitude also accorded with a deep but unstated assumption of the latter, the bulk of whom came from the higher castes, that the sacred books in Sanskrit were worthy of serious consideration while popular customs and beliefs were not. And though the lower castes greatly outnumbered the high castes, their customs and beliefs were ignored as they did not appear worth reporting to the high castes, who had the additional fear that the outside world would regard them as crude if not barbarous.

Those who relied on what they had seen or heard—and almost all of them were foreigners—had a less flattering tale to tell. Not unnaturally they paid attention to those features of Hinduism which they considered would interest Europeans most, and this emphasis meant that they wrote about the more sensational features of pre-British Hinduism such as *suttee*, human sacrifice, *thuggee*, fire-walking, the grotesque expressions of asceticism, *devadasis*, the worship of blood-thirsty village goddesses with the slaughter of many animals, the excesses and distortions of the Shakti cult, and so on. Whatever may have been the reception accorded in England to these blood-curdling reports, educated Indians resented them as making them appear savage. This reaction led to their becoming two-faced: on one side, they became critical of many features of traditional Hinduism and this led to their starting reformist movements like the Brahmo Samaj; on the other, for them to "defend" Hinduism became a patriotic duty. The best of them did so with considerable learning, skill and eloquence, but that could not hide the fact they were propagandists and not earnest seekers of truth.

European students were either uncritical admirers, sensationalists, or reformers who for one reason or other emphasized the "unsavoury" features of Hinduism and caste. Nowhere in their accounts is there a complete acceptance of the religion and a detached description of it in which there is neither praise nor condemnation.

II

It is impossible to define Hinduism because there are no beliefs or institutions which are common to all Hindus, and which mark

them off from others. While the institution of caste is in a sense fundamental to Hinduism, it is not confined to Hindus, as Indian Muslims, Christians and Sikhs are all divided into castes. Again, there are groups within Hinduism which are not castes in the full sense of the term.

Every belief considered as basic to Hindus has been rejected by one group or another. Thus the South Indian Shaivite sect of Lingayats reject in theory many of the allegedly basic beliefs of the Hindus, including the revelatory character of the Vedas. This sect also does not believe in the doctrine of *Karma*. The atheistic and hedonistic sect of Charvakas rejected every traditional idea including *dharma*, but still they remained Hindus, though their opponents classed them with Buddhists.

It is not entirely true to say that one can only be born into Hinduism, for Heliodorous (about 2nd century B.C.), a Greek, is mentioned as a *bhagavata*, a follower of Vishnu. And the Arya Samajists are trying to convert non-Hindus, or more correctly, reconvert former Hindus, to Hinduism. But, by and large, it is true that the most important way of "recruitment" to Hinduism is by birth into one of the many Hindu castes. It should not, however, be forgotten that gradually, in the course of centuries, alien groups who came to India assumed the character of castes and entered the Hindu fold.

While there are no ideas, institutions and deities common to the Hindus, and which they do not share with non-Hindus, certain ideas like *karma* and *dharma*, an institution like caste, and deities like Shiva and Vishnu, are widespread among Hindus. It is only in the case of a few groups and individuals that it is difficult to say whether they are Hindus or not. In short, while it is not possible to define a Hindu, it is not very difficult to identify a person as Hindu.

III

It is impossible to detach Hinduism from the caste system. According to orthodox Hindu belief, mentioned for the first time in the Rigvedic hymn *Purushasukta*, the four *varnas* or orders formed the limbs of primeval man (*Purusha*), who was victim in the divine sacrifice which produced the cosmos. The Brahmins emerged from his mouth, Kshatriyas from his arms, Vaishyas from his thighs and Shudras from his feet. The Untouchable castes find no

mention in the hymn. Further, certain theological ideas such as rebirth (*samsara*), the idea that the deeds done by an individual determine his position in his next birth (*karma*), *papa* (sin), *punya* (merit), *moksha* (salvation) and *dharma* (morality) are intimately related to the caste system. For instance, the idea of *karma* teaches a Hindu that he is born into a particular caste because of certain actions he performed in a previous life (*janma*). The *Dharmasutras* mention that if a man does good deeds he will be born in a high caste and be well-endowed, while if he does sinful acts, he will be born in a low caste, or even as an animal—a pig or a donkey. The progress and retrogression of a soul goes on until it attains salvation, the nature of which is differently conceived in the different sects, but all have this in common that the perfected soul is released from the necessity of continual birth and death, and that it either lives in intimate and perpetual contact with God or is absorbed in Him. Birth in a particular caste becomes, therefore, an index of a soul's progress toward God. *Dharma*, the total body of moral and religious rules, is to some extent identified with the duties of one's caste—and this not only by the common people, but in works of great influence like the *Bhagavadgita*.

Certain ideas regarding pollution and purity are cardinal to Hinduism. There are differences between the various regions and castes in the strictness and elaborateness of the rules regarding pollution and purity, but everywhere they cover a large sector of life. Inter-caste relations are governed at many points by ideas of pollution. Normally, each caste is endogamous, and complete commensality prevails only within it. There are many kinds of restrictions between castes—on the free acceptance of food and drink, on inter-marriage and sex relations, on touching or going near a member of another caste, etc.; and they all relate to pollution. That is, a violation of it pollutes the member of the higher caste, and he has to undergo a purificatory rite, simple or elaborate, according to the seriousness of the violation. In such matters, it is the caste council that takes the necessary disciplinary action.

The field of pollution is not, however, confined to intercaste relations—the members of a lineage or joint family are, for instance, polluted when a birth or death occurs in it, and, occasionally, all the members of a village have to observe ceremonial purity at the periodical festival of a village-deity. Again, a man has to be ritually pure when he is praying, or performing one of the many voluntary

vratas (religious vows undertaken to obtain certain results). This requirement applies to the Untouchable no less than to the Brahmin. Orthodox Hindus, especially members of the higher castes, show a preoccupation with bathing, fasting, changing clothes, etc.

Historically, sectarian movements have ended by becoming castes. This fact is significant in the understanding of Hinduism, for the theological positions of many Hindus are largely the result of birth in a particular caste, as is certainly true of the three Brahminical castes of South India. Thus a man is a devotee of Shiva and a follower of pure monism (*advaita*) if he is born a Smartha, while he is an exclusive devotee of Vishnu and a follower of qualified monism (*vishishtadvaita*) if he is born a Shrivaishnava, and a believer in dualism (*dvaita*) if he is born a Madhva. It must, however, be mentioned that the various sects could not have flourished and decayed if intellectual positions had been entirely determined by birth in a particular group.

Caste is not the only part of the social structure to be permeated with religion. Even the village community and the family or joint family in which Hindus usually live are also cult groups. There are deities—usually goddesses—in every village who, if propitiated suitably, keep epidemics and drought away, and look after the general welfare of the village. Among the higher castes, the dead father and mother of the male head of the household are annually offered food and water at the well-known ritual of *shraddha*. The dead father's father and great grandfather and their wives, also partake of the offerings. Even remoter ancestors' spirits, up to the fourteenth generation, come in for their share.

As far as the lower castes and tribes are concerned, however, practice varies from region to region and from group to group. Offerings of meat and liquor to manes are, however, common among them.

The division of life into four stages or *ashramas* has scriptural sanction, and it is likely that the *ashrama*-scheme, though ideally meant for all the males of the twice-born castes, was practically confined to the Brahmins and to some Kshatriyas, especially during the Vedic and epic periods. The first stage of studentship (*Brahmacharya*) under a teacher, came to an end at about sixteen when the boy married and entered the second stage of *grihastha* or householder. In that station he had to perform sacrifices, be hospitable and have children, especially sons. At the approach of old age, the householder was expected to retire to the forest to study and

meditate (*vanaprastha*), and the last stage was *sanyasa*, when the man renounced the world to devote himself to live in contact with God and to preach the truths he had experienced. He donned ochre-coloured robes and led a wandering and mendicant life. It should not be a matter of surprise that only a few of those eligible for the last two *ashramas* really entered it, but the interesting thing to note is that throughout Indian history some of the finest spirits have been attracted to these ideals.

The goals (*purusharthas*) which human beings ought to pursue were also laid down: they were, *dharma* (right conduct), *artha* (wealth), *kama* (satisfaction of desire), and *moksha* (salvation). The pursuit of the second and third goals have to be governed by the rules of *dharma*. While the first three goals were all external to man and therefore attainable (*sadhya*), the last one was immanent in him and it had only to be given a chance to unfold itself (*siddha*). In Hindu theory, therefore, the instinctive, moral and spiritual aspects of man are all considered legitimate, and worthy of expression.

IV

No consideration of the relation between the social order and Hinduism is complete without a reference to the process by which the culture of the highest groups in the hierarchy, especially the Brahmins, has spread over the entire country and, through Buddhism, even outside. Because Sanskrit was the language of these highest groups, this process of cultural propagation is here called "Sanskritization." This culture is not simply the one that the Indo-Aryans brought with them to India from Western Asia, but something much more complex, which involved the absorption of several indigenous features. For instance, the Brahmins of the Rigvedas were non-vegetarians and drank *soma* but gradually (perhaps due to the influence of Jains and Buddhists) they became vegetarians and teetotallers. In the realm of religion, there was a fusion of Indo-Aryan, Harappan and other indigenous (some of them tribal) cultures. It is this composite culture which has been called Hindu culture, and it has throughout reacted to the forces with which it came in contact.

Hinduism does not convert people in the overt way in which Christianity and Islam do, but this does not mean that there is no conver-

sion in it. In the past, alien groups such as the Scythians, Parthians, White Huns, Yue-chi and many others have been absorbed into the Hindu fold, and it is not unlikely that even alien individuals were able to become Hindus. And throughout Indian history the religion and culture of the isolated tribal groups and low castes have undergone Sanskritization, and the improvement of communications which took place during British rule accelerated this process. Certain sects such as the Lingayats in the South (12th century A.D.) and the Swaminarayan in Gujarat, have also contributed to the greater Sanskritization of the Hindu population in their respective areas. Sometimes a caste (e.g., the Panchala or Smith of South India) tried to Sanskritize its way of life completely in order to raise itself in the caste hierarchy. The intimate relation existing between Sanskritization and social mobility was chiefly responsible for the popularity of the former. Only in the case of Untouchables has Sanskritization failed to raise their status.

Quite apart from Sanskritization, many Hindu sects did openly try to convert. When the great Shankaracharya (about 9th century A.D.) was born, Buddhism and Jainism were flourishing in many parts of India. Both the Buddhists and Jains had an elaborate monastic organization, and probably some of their success in conversion was due to it. Shankara was not only a great theologian but a great organizer as well. Not content with dialectical victories over the Buddhists, he established monasteries in different corners of India for propagating pure monism. Monasticism became a regular feature of Hindu sects after Shankara. Ramanuja (12th century A.D.) and Madhva (14th century A.D.) both founded monasteries. Ramanuja founded the Shrivaishnava sect, and he won many adherents to it from Jains, from Shaivites and from the low castes. The Lingayat sect, founded by the Brahmin Basava, also spread among the castes of the Kannada- and Telugu-speaking countries, converting Hindus, especially non-Brahmins, to the exclusive worship of Shiva.

The only sense in which Hinduism is not proselytizing is that there is no formal mechanism for the conversion of individual non-Hindus. This is partly due to the caste system, as without membership in a caste a man has no place in society—he cannot find a bride, he cannot confer a recognizable status on his children, and he has no rules with which to regulate his relations with others.

V

Even the genius of Hinduism for blending diverse beliefs has not been able to prevent the occurrence of sects, the gods Shiva and Vishnu being the two most important nuclei for their formation. In Hindu cosmogony every major deity has several manifestations. For instance, Shiva is called Gangādhara, Mahadeva, Ishwara, Nīlakantha and Nataraja, and similarly Vishnu has many names. Each name of a deity either refers to a mythical incident in which he plays a part, or to a particular quality of his, or to both.

Besides, each deity has a wife who is usually worshipped along with her husband. And just as a god has several forms, so too has his wife—a good many of the village goddesses are identified with Kaḷi, Bhadrakāḷi, Bhagavati, Durga, Chandi and Chamundi, and these deities are in turn made out to be forms of Pārvati, wife of Shiva. Again, Shiva has two sons, Gaṇapati and Skanda, and each of them is associated with certain indigenous cults. Ganapati is associated with agricultural cults, and Skanda, as Subramaṇya, is identified with the cobra cult in South India. In the case of Vishnu the idea of *avatara* (literally, 'descent') is responsible for his identification with certain mythological, quasi-historical and historical figures. For instance, Vishnu was reincarnated as a boar (*Varahavatara*) to rescue the earth from the sea, as Rama, the hero of the epic *Ramayana*, as the Brahmin Parashurāma whom Rama subdued, as Krishna, and as the historical Buddha. The idea behind *avatara* is that God allows himself to be reborn on earth periodically to overcome evil and restore righteousness (*Bhagavadgita*, iv, 5-8). It is natural that the idea of *avatara* should be associated with Vishnu the Protector, and not with either Brahma the Creator, or Shiva the Destroyer.

Not only are the many forms of a god and of his wife and children worshipped, but also the particular animal or bird (*vahana*, literally, 'vehicle') which he rides. Thus the bull Nandi which Shiva rides, the Brahmani kite Garuda which Vishnu rides and the peacock of Skanda are all worshipped. Orthodox Hindus object to killing cattle, Brāhmani kites and peacocks. The particular variety of mouse on which Ganapati rides is also regarded as sacred.

The worship of Shiva and Vishnu goes back to Vedic times, and probably even farther back in the case of the former deity. Archaeologists have found several phallus-like objects in Harappa-Mohen-

jodaro which they identify with the *linga*, the emblem of Shiva as procreator; and an image on a Harappan seal has been identified as that of Pashupati, the lord of animals, one of the forms of Shiva. If these identifications are true, then the cult of Shiva is certainly pre-Vedic. The name Shiva (literally, 'auspicious') does not occur, however, early in the Vedas. The Vedic gods are mostly nature gods, and Rudra, the god of thunder, figures prominently in the Rigveda only to give way subsequently to Shiva. Vishnu is also a minor deity in the Rigveda being only an aspect of the sun-god. The important Vedic gods Varuna, Mitra, Rudra, Indra, Agni, Prajapati and Savitar lose their importance gradually—some of them like Varuna and Vishnu change their character completely—and in their place emerges the trinity made up of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. Brahma does not occur in the Vedas, but seems to have developed during the period of the Brahmanas. He declined in importance subsequently, and in the twentieth century Vishnu and Shiva were the two most important gods. Ganesha, Skanda and the monkey-god Hanuman are also popular.

It is the height of over-simplification to speak of a homogeneous Vishnu or Shiva sect. Each sect is the result of the fusion of number of smaller cults. Thus the Shiva sect represents the fusion of the Harappan cults of the phallus and Pashupati, the Vedic cults of Rudra and Shiva, and many post-Vedic Shiva cults from different parts of India. Each sect may be compared to a huge river, which is joined by many tributaries and which is known by different names in different parts of the country.

There has been much rivalry between the two sects of Shiva and Vishnu, and persecution of the rival sect has not been unknown. The Lingayats call themselves Vīrashaivas or extreme Shaivites, and they do not worship any god but Shiva, and similarly, the Shrivaishnavas and Madhvas worship only Vishnu. But there also has been a tendency to stress the identity of both the deities, and this has shown itself both at the popular and philosophical levels. Trimūrti and the three-headed god Dattatreya represent attempts at a synthesis of the three major gods. The union of Shiva and Vishnu is also expressed in the composite god Harihara, and in the Puranic tale of Mohini-Bhasmāsura. Ardha-Narishwara represents an attempt to symbolize the unity of Shiva and Parvati, of a god and his wife, and of husband and wife generally. These efforts at synthesis of rival cults and deities were perhaps attempts to overcome sectarian rivalry and bitterness.

The "extroverted" nature-worship of the Vedas gradually gave way to the earnest philosophical speculation of the Upanishads in which there is a preoccupation with matters like the nature of the universe, and the destiny of the individual soul. The dominant bias of the Upanishads is in favour of a pantheistic explanation of the universe, though theistic and dualistic ideas also find expression in them. The *Bhagavadgita* is a great work of synthesis, and one of the many things it tries to reconcile is a pantheistic explanation of the universe with faith in a personal god who is intensely concerned with good and evil, and with the welfare of human beings. Even more important, however, is its recognition of the three paths to God, viz., the way of knowledge (*jnana*), of works (*karma*) and of love or devotion (*bhakti*). According to this view God is not the preserve of the learned only, but is within reach of everyone, including "women and the Shudras." The idea of *bhakti* ante-dates the Gita—it also occurs in the hymns to Varuna and in the Shandilya and Narada Sutras—but it is in the latter work that it is given great importance, and since then the idea of *bhakti* has come to have a central place in Hinduism not only with the masses but with the intellectuals as well. It has found a place in philosophical Hinduism. The founders of the early north Indian school of Pancharātra were the first to make Vaishnavite devotionalism the basis of their philosophical system. The great philosopher of the *bhakti* movement, Ramanuja, the propounder of qualified monism, derives his basic idea of the distinction between the individual soul and God from the Pancharātra school.

While in North India the *bhakti* movement has usually been associated with Vishnu, especially in his manifestation as Krishna, in the South a deep *bhakti* strain has characterized both Shaivism and Vaishnavism. The Shaivite Nayanars as well as the Vaishnavite Āḻvars lived roughly during the same period (7th-9th centuries A.D.) and it is not unlikely that they influenced each other. The distinctive mark of these Schools was the development of the idea of love (*anbu* in Tamil) toward God. A sense of sin and unworthiness oppresses the devotee, and he craves for the grace (*kripa*) of God. The Shrivaishnavas paid special attention to the ideas of grace and surrender (*prapatti*).

The *bhakti* movement spread northward from the Tamil country into every part of India, and ever since the *Gita* it has been an important force in Hinduism. But it is surprising to note that in spite

of this, Hinduism is frequently described as advocating a rigid, monolithic pantheism, and that it does not pay much heed to the religious striving of individuals. Even Shankara, the expounder of extreme monism (*kevaladvaita*), is credited with the authorship of some devotional verses of transcendental beauty in honour of Devi (goddess), Vishnu and Shiva.

VI

No account of sectarianism is complete without a reference to Shakti cult which has attracted much attention because of its singular character. The Shaktas, as the followers of the cult are called, are the worshippers of Shakti (literally 'energy'), which is the personification of the female principle in the creation of the universe. Normally, among Hindus, the worship of a deity takes precedence over that of his wife, but in Shakti worship the procedure is reversed. Shiva's wife Parvati is usually the central object of Shakti worship, in some of her manifestations such as Devi, Mahadevi, Jaganmata, Durga, Kali, Bhagavati and Chamundi. The worship of Vishnu's consort Lakshmi in Shakti cults is much rarer. The cult is elaborated in Sanskrit works known as Tantras (about 6th-7th centuries A.D.) in which are mentioned in detail, the special forms and attendants of the 'great goddess.' Shaktas are divided into the followers of the 'right hand path' (*dakshiṇachari*) and the 'left hand path (*vamachari*). The latter are extremists but even among them, only a few practise the cult with the five m's prescribed in some Tantras, viz., *mamsa* (flesh), *matsya* (fish), *madya* (wine), *maithuna* (copulation) and *mudra* (mystical finger signs).

It is necessary to point out here that the term 'Shakti Cult' is used loosely to include the propitiation of village goddesses (especially in South India) with the sacrifice of many animals and, occasionally, also with liquor. This usage is not correct, as frequently no Sanskrit *mantras* are uttered, let alone *mantras* from the Tantras.

It is just an indigenous and respectable mode of worship that has persisted throughout the centuries, probably from pre-Aryan times. The usage of the term is probably more justified in Bengal, Bihar and Assam where the goddesses Durga and Kali are worshipped not only with meat and liquor, but also with *mantras* from Tantras.

VII

While the intellectual has concentrated his attention on the Upanishads, *Bhagavadgita*, and the writings of the three great *acharyas* and their followers, the ordinary man's religiosity has found expression in the punctilious observance of the rules of pollution and purity, in praying as required by family and caste tradition, in the performance of the elaborate rites of passage, in the celebration of calendrical festivals, in undertaking fasts and religious austerities, in the elaborate propitiation of dead ancestors and local deities, in listening to public reading of religious stories (*harikatha*), and in going on pilgrimages to sacred rivers and to the shrines of reputed deities. The astrologer is consulted at every crisis, and in the rural areas, and especially among the lower castes, the exorcist and the medium of the local deity are also resorted to. Features of the outer environment, including certain plants and animals, are regarded as sacred. In brief, religion permeates the Hindu's life at every point. Many of the popular religious stories are nothing else but somewhat monotonous illustrations of how piety is rewarded with success in this life and heaven afterward. (They are quite different from the lives of saints which are essentially tales of struggle and sorrow but crowned ultimately by divine grace.) And as we have seen earlier, religion is also related to the critical elements in the social structure. The Westernization of the country has, it is true, breached Hinduism at many points, but it has also purified and strengthened it in certain other aspects.

VIII

Like every living religion Hinduism has reacted to contemporary forces from the earliest times. The simple and optimistic religion of the Rigvedic Aryans gradually, under the influence of Brahmins, gave way to ritualism, and to the metaphysical speculation of the Upanishads. It is not unlikely that the change which came over Hinduism, was due to some extent to contact with cults previously existing in India. This can be said more definitely of the changes which occurred in some Vedic deities. Enough has already been said about the influence of Buddhism and Jainism on Hinduism. The opponents of Shankara called him a *prachhanna buddha* or crypto Buddhist because they thought that he had incorporated certain

Buddhist ideas into his system. The next challenge came from Islam and it gave rise to Sikhism and Arya Samaj in the North. It is popular in some circles to detect Christian influence in Ramanuja and Madhva, but this is far from established. India's more recent contact with Christianity—from which it is not easy to separate contact with the British—produced a revolution in Hindu minds. Sensitive Hindus who imbibed Western culture and read the Bible began to view Hinduism critically. The result was the initiation of a series of reforms which continued if anything with greatly increased vigour after India became independent. The discovery of Sanskrit by the West, and the systematic reconstruction of Indian history by Western or Western-inspired scholarship, and the appreciation which Indian thought and art have received all over the world, strengthened India's self-confidence.

It could be said that on a short-term view Hinduism has been purified and strengthened by contact with the West. So far the conflict between religion and science which has been so acutely felt in the West has not been paralleled in India.

"What is the future of Hinduism?" is a question as important as it is difficult to answer. Many and conflicting forces are at work. The planned economic development of the country, the spread of education and the desire to bring about a socialistic pattern of society, might well affect religion adversely. Hinduism seems particularly vulnerable as it lacks the organization of either Christianity or Islam. The changes which are likely to take place under the Plans, in the three chief carriers of tradition—village, caste and joint family —might prove more effective as a solvent of Hinduism than any purely ideological attack.

INDEX

ACHARI, 67
Administration, efficiency in, 36
Administrative Reforms Committee of Kerala, the report of, 2, 4
Advaita, 152
Affines, 70
Affinity, 138
Africa, 96
Agnates, 70
Ahir, 90
Ambedkar, B. R., 25
American Civil War, 79
Amrit Kaur, Rajkumari, 36
Andaman Islanders, 136
Andhra, 2, 5, 26-29, 31-33, 75, 90
Andhra Communist Party, 26
Andrews, C. F., 100
Anglo-Saxons, 134
Anthropologist, 62, 118, 120-123, 134-139, 141, 143, 144
  American, 144
  British, 144
  Social, 116, 117, 120, 123, 136, 139, 141, 143-145
Anthropology, 1
  Indian, 59
  Social, 120, 122, 134, 136, 137, 140, 142-145, 147
Anti-Brahmin policy, 75
Anti-Brahminism, 22
Apastamba, 129
Arcot,
  North, 30
  South, 30, 31
Archaeology, 1, 130
Ardha-Narishwara, 156
Arya, 63, 64
Arya Samaj, 50, 160
Arya Samajists, 107, 150
Aryans, 31, 64
  Rg-Vedic, 159
Asia, Western, 153
Ashramas, 152, 153
Ashrama scheme, 152
Assam, 99, 158
Australian aborigines, 136
Australian tribes, 138, 142
Avakasham, 78
Avatara, 155
Ayogava, 64

BACKWARD CASTES, 2, 4, 21, 76, 86, 89, 93, 96
  discrimination practised against, 105
  preference and concessions to, 5
  preferential treatment to, 78, 79
Backward classes, 3, 21, 33, 40, 87
  reservation for, 21
Backward Classes Committee Report, Mysore (1961), 2
Backward Community, 2
Backwardness,
  economic, 3, 4
  economic criterion of, 2, 3
  neutral indices of, 41
  privileges of, 40
  social, 3
Badlapur, 80
Baffin Land, 136
Bailey, F. G., 9, 17, 55
Balais, 18, 59
Bangalore, 51, 83, 84
Banias, 5, 93
Bant, 5
Barber, 74, 78, 82, 94
Baroda, 95
Barots of Gujarat, 10
Barots, Vahivancha, 117
Barnes, J. A., 137
Basava, 43, 125, 132, 154
Beals, A. R., 83
Bedas, 69
Belgaum, 25
Belief, 59, 123
Benares, 105
Bengal, 158
Bengal army, 20
Bhadrakali, 10, 155
Bhagavadgita, 148, 151, 155, 157, 159
Bhagavata, 150
Bhagavati, 155, 158
Bhakti, 157
Bhind, 37
Bhumihar, 6, 36
Bible, 160
Bihalli, 117
Bihar, 2, 5, 37, 158
Bisipara, 17
Black-marketing, 84
Blood-sacrifices, 50
Boad outcastes, 18
Boas, Franz, 136
Bombay, 21, 22, 32, 76, 77, 96
Brahma, 155, 156
Brahmacharya, 152
Brahman, 148
Brahmana, 63, 64, 156

Brahmin, 5, 10, 18-20, 22, 25, 27, 28, 30, 36, 44, 47, 52, 53, 57, 60, 63, 66, 68, 69, 74, 86, 89, 93, 98, 104, 105, 108, 132, 152
Brahminical customs, 44
Brahminical dominance, 4
Brahminical monopoly, 23
Brahminical supremacy, 20
Brahminization, 42, 43
Brahmins, 8, 10, 11, 20-22, 24, 26, 29, 33, 34, 42, 43, 45, 48, 51-55, 60-62, 66, 74, 75, 85, 86, 93, 94, 148, 150, 153, 159
  and the caste system, 55
  Bengali, 42
  Bihari, 20
  dietary of, 54
  domination of, 22
  Kashmiri, 42
  Konkanastha, 24
  Maratha, 20
  Marka, 66
  migration of, 85, 86
  Nambudri, 15, 34
  Saraswat, 42
  Valmiki, 69
  Vishwakarma, 43, 69
  westernized, 54, 86
Brahmo Samaj, 50, 149
Bride price, 54
British Empire, 79
British Government, 19
British rule, 4, 12, 17, 19, 20, 48, 51, 52, 56, 62, 79, 80, 96, 99, 107, 131, 133, 154
Buddha, 155
Buddhism, 153, 154, 159
Buddhists, 61, 100, 132, 150, 153, 154, 160
Buhler, 129

Calcutta, 1, 76, 96
Canada, 139
Cape Comorin, 98
Caste, 9, 13, 17, 18, 26, 29, 33, 41, 57, 60-62, 68-72, 85, 89, 95, 98, 103, 105, 108, 110, 111, 130, 131, 137, 140, 142, 151, 154, 160
  and caste-like units, 6
  and class, 50, 95
  and commensality, 3, 130, 151
  and communication, 6
  and economic power, 7, 8, 45, 92
  and education, 1
  and elections, 2, 31
  and family, 73, 79
  and hierarchy, 3, 56, 85, 92
  and high ritual position, 7
  and kin relations, 129
  and occupation, 93-95
  and political functions, 7, 15
  and political power, 7, 8, 45, 92
  and politics, 2, 5, 6
  and pollution, 3
  and purity, 3
  and region, 27
  and religion, 13
  and religious divisions, 103
  and ritual factors, 8
  and ritual ranking, 45
  and solidarity, 74
  and the political party, 2
  as endogamous unit, 3, 5, 6, 58, 65, 89, 151
  as ritual unit, 6
  as structural basis of Hindu society, 44
  at the all-India level, 8
  banks, 89
  bonds, 83, 88
  basis of voting, 72
  charities, 89
  conferences, 75, 89
  cooperative societies, 89
  disintegration, 6
  evil system of, 40
  flexibility, 6
  Hindus, 75
  horizontal spread of, 78
  hostels, 89
  in administration, 5, 6
  in public life, 1, 2
  interdependence of, 7, 16, 74
  in the democratic processes, 1, 7
  in the industrial processes, 7
  journals, 16, 75, 89
  lines, 114
  marriage halls, 89
  new opportunities for, 5
  non-Brahmin, 27, 44
  occupational specialization of, 83
  popular impression of, 36
  principle of, 72
  principles, 7
  ritual position of, 8
  ritual rank of, 67
  statistics regarding, 2
  structure, 121
  ties, 15, 74
Caste-consciousness, 17, 37, 89
Caste solidarity, 74
Caste system, 7, 40, 42, 45, 52, 60, 65, 66, 70, 131, 150, 154
  and change, 5
  and group mobility, 55
  and land-ownership, 135
  and mobility, 8, 80
  and the ritual, 45
Casteism, 70, 79

Casteism and removal of Untouchability, report of the seminar on, 39, 40
Casteless society, 15
Casteless and classless society, 60, 71, 87
Castes, 19, 73, 108, 132, 149, 152
  Hindu, 45
  in Gujarat, 16
  in rural areas, 142
  interaction between, 135
  intermediate, 21
  land-owning, 91, 93
  low, 45, 46, 69
  non-Brahmin, 11, 21, 49, 65, 86, 132
  non-Brahmin Peasant, 10
  power relations of, 104
  The Hindu and Sikh, 37
  The leaders of non-Brahmin, 4
Catholics, 35
Census, 18, 33
Ceremonial purity, 151
Ceylon, 6, 96
Chaitanya, 49
Chamars, 37, 94, 98
Champakam Dorairajan, 33, 34
Chamundi, 155, 158
Chandala, 64
Chandi, 155
Change, 77, 102, 104, 116, 126, 127, 128, 137
Changes, 133
  cultural, 58
  structural, 58
Chapekar, N. S., 80
Charvakas, 150
Cheluvadi, 74
Chenniah, S., 41
China, 96, 136, 139
Chingleput, 31
Christianity, 19, 60, 106, 107, 132, 153, 160
Christian influence, 160
Christian missionaries, 35, 107
Christians, 4, 30, 34, 36, 88, 103, 133, 150
  Syrian, 5
Church, 30, 35, 148
Class, 137
  and egalitarian ideals, 96
  middle, 96
  war, 37
  working, 87
Classes, 64
  middle, 101, 102
  rich, 101
  upper, 88, 139
  urbanized middle, 89
  working, 102
Cochin Party, 35
Cohn, B., 98, 118
Commonwealth Party, 31
Communal bodies, 41
Communal composition, 33
Communal party, 35
Communal policy, 21
Communal representation, 23
Communalism, 23
  Hindu, 38
Communication,
  improvements in, 74, 78
  lack of, 77
  means of, 101
  medium of, 100, 102
  problem of, 70
  the development of, 96
Communism, 86
Communist Party, 27, 28
Communists, 26, 28, 29, 75
Comparative method, 137, 138
Conflict, the Hindu-Sikh, 37
Congress, 22, 25-30, 32, 35, 36, 41, 49, 71
  capitalist domination of the, 25
  Catholic, 35
  Democratic, 34
  Indian National, 15, 34
  legislative party in Andhra Pradesh, 29
  Party, 102
  Working Committee, 2
Congress Committee, Mysore Pradesh, 41
Consanguinity,, 138
Constitution, 33, 34, 39, 40, 49, 71, 73, 75, 91, 104, 141
  and fundamental rights, 34
  and the communal Government order, 34
  of India, 18, 23, 87
Constitutions, 16
Conversion, 106-108, 133, 153, 154
Coorg, 8, 10, 12, 32, 42, 52, 56, 61, 62, 98
Cosmogony, 155
Cosmopolitanism, 4
Coulanges, Fustel de, 136
Council,
  Village, 114, 115
  caste, 114
Cultural frontiers, 101
Cultural homogeneity, 70
Cultural idiom, 103
Culture, 98, 128, 137, 140, 153
  book-view of, 140
  Hindu, 153
  regional, 98
  Indian, 53
  sanskritic, 59, 62

Culture-areas, 59, 98, 121, 138
Curzon, 100
Customs, non-sanskritic, 62

Dakshinachari, 158
Dakshina Pradesh, 31, 32
Dasa, 63
Dasyu, 64
Dattatreya, 156
Decentralisation, the policy of, 91
Deity, 132, 155
  domestic, 53
  village, 151
Deities, 106, 148, 152, 155, 156, 159
  blood sacrifices to, 49
De-Sanskritization, 62
Desai, I. P., 129
Devadasi, 149
Development programmes, 91, 145
Devi, 158
Dharma, 48, 115, 150, 151, 153
Dharmasastras, 129
Dharmasutras, 129, 151
Diet, 45, 52
Diffusionists, 144
Disputes, 112, 113, 115-117
Distillers, the Boad and the Ganjam, 17
Divorce, 46, 50, 131, 144
Dominant caste, 9-11, 27, 30, 32, 89-93, 99, 103-105, 118, 141
Dominant castes, 75
  solidarity of the, 114
Dowry, 48, 54
Dowry system, 86
  and the endogamous circle, 4
Dravidar, 24
Dravidians, 31
Dravidistan, 31
Dravida Kazhagam, 22, 30, 31
Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, 22, 31
Dualism, 152
Dubois, Abbé, 50
Durga, 155, 158
Durkheim, Emile, 136, 142
Dvaita, 152

Economic depression, 54
Economic development, programme of, 95
Economic growth and inter-caste tensions, 109
Economic horizon, widening of the, 52
Economic Weekly, 32
Economy,
  international, 83
  national, 83
  peasant, 127, 135
  pre-British, 56
Egalitarian society, 17, 40, 88
Egalitarian order, 88
Egalitarianism, 95, 96
Egypt, 136
Ekantada Ramayya, 43
Elections, 23, 29, 34
  role of caste in, 25
Elite, 1, 100, 101
Emigration, 83
Endogamy, 130
  the unity of, 4
Equality, 40
Ethnographic reality, 63
Ethnographic data, 136
Evans-Pritchard, E. E., 117, 134, 136
Evolutionists, 144
Exogamous unit, 58
Exogamy, village, 58, 78

Faction, 115
Family, 122
  elementary, 113
  nuclear, 95
Family unit, 84
Female infanticide, 49
Feud, 134
Feudal, 73, 96
Field-work, 136, 138, 139, 141, 142, 144
Five-Year Plan, 41, 55, 60, 76, 101
Fiji Islands, 96
Folk, 60
  caste, 72
  village, 72
Forward classes, 4
Franchise, adult, 5, 75, 76
Frazer, 136
Freedom movement, 101
Function, 144

Ganapati, 155
Gandhi, Mahatma, 13, 19, 22, 25, 50
Ganesha, 156
Gangadhara, 155
Gangadikara, 5
Ganges, 47, 106
Garratt, G.T., 99
Garuda, 155
Gautama, 129
Genealogical records, 135
Genealogies, 117
Genealogist, 141
General Elections, 2
Ghurye, G. S., 16, 19-23, 61, 63, 65, 80
Gift exchange, 142
Gita, 157
Gluckman, Max G., 134

Goa, 111
Gopala Reddi, B., 29
Gough, Kathleen, 6, 7, 85
Gounder, 90
Government of Bengal, 17
Government of India, 12, 23, 40, 85, 94, 109, 146
Government of India, British, 19
Government of Madras, 85
Government of Mysore, 81, 83
Grain payments, 74
Great tradition, 10, 141
Greece, 136
Greek, 150
Griffin, Sir Lepel, 19
Grihastha, 152
Gujar, 37, 90
Gujarat, 3, 5, 16, 90, 135
Gujaratis, 95
Gumperz, J., 99
Gurkhas, 20

HADDON, A. C., 136
Hallikar, 5
Halu, 5
Hanuman, 156
Hanumanthiah, K., 32, 33, 72
Harappan culture, 153
Harappa-Mohenjodaro, 155, 156
Harihara, 156
Harijan, 29, 30, 33, 37, 66, 67, 71-76, 89, 91-93, 95, 104, 107, 108
Harikatha, 159
  influence of, 48, 49
Harrison, Selig, 26-30
Heliodorous, 150
Henotheism, 148
Hierarchical principle, 94
Hierarchy, 17, 42, 45, 46, 48, 52, 55, 66, 67, 79, 80, 89, 90, 92, 95-97, 130, 131, 153, 164
  functional, 96
  in diet and occupation, 67
  lack of clarity in the, 66
  local, 66
  of values, 110
  rural economic, 51
  traditional, 95
Himachal Pradesh, 38
Hindi, 37, 99, 101, 102
Hind Swaraj, 50
Hindu, 65, 110, 129, 133, 153
  castes, 150
  institutions, 140
  social system, 131
  society, 140
Hindus, 19, 34, 44, 50, 66, 104, 106-108, 119, 124, 131, 149, 150, 152, 158
Hinduism, 12, 50, 59, 60, 76, 106-108, 132, 133, 148-155, 157-160
  and social order, 153
  all-India, 141
  local, 141
  peninsular, 141
  regional, 141
Hindusthan, 99
Hissar, 38
Hogur, 117, 126
Holdings, fragmentation of, 122
Holeyas, 43, 71
Home rule, 23
Huns, White, 154
Human sacrifices, 49
Huber, 136
Hutton, J. H., 20
Hyderabad, 32
Hypergamous relation, 58

IDEOLOGY,
  capitalist, 55
  democratic, 55
  laissez faire, 55
  socialist, 55
  Western liber-rationalist, 20
Idiom,
  cultural, 103
  social, 103
Indian army, 28
  composition of, 19, 20
  reorganisation of, 19
Indian Daily Mail, 21
Indian freedom movement, 100
Indian Mutiny, 19
Indian National Congress, 15
Indian nationalist struggle, 100
Indian Republic, 102, 110
Indian Science Congress, 1
Indian Statutory Commission, 22
Indian Union, 102
Indians, Westernized, 53
Indo-Aryan culture, 153
Indo-Aryans, 153
Indologists, 140
Indology, 130
Indra, 156
Industrial life, 95
Industrialization, 60, 61, 76, 77, 81, 83, 101, 104, 108
Industrial revolution, 76
Infant mortality, 83
Institutions,
  cultural, 128
  social, 128, 129, 133, 135
Integration,
  administrative, 96
  political, 55, 96
  religious, 107
Intelligentsia, 19, 131

Indian, 149
Urban, 125
Intensive method, 142
Intensive studies, 145
Inter-caste marriages, 76
Inter-caste relations, 76, 151
Inter-caste tensions, 76, 104, 113
Ireland, 139
Iroquois, 136
Ishwara, 155
Islam, 60, 106, 107, 132, 153, 160
Izhavans, 5, 34

JAGANMATA, 158
Jains, 4, 61, 88, 100, 103, 132, 153, 154
Jainism, 154, 159
Jaipal Singh, 36
Jajmani system, 7
Janata Party, 36
Japan, 139
Jati, 5, 89, 140
Jats, 10, 20, 90
Jayaswal, 129
Jedhe, K., 25
Jews, 88
Jharkhand, 36
Jharkhand Party, 36
Jinnah, M. A., 13
Jnana, 157
Joint family, 70, 85, 92, 128, 142, 151, 152, 160
partition of, 81
Justice, Ideal of, 115
Justice, Madras non-Brahmin Party paper, 24
Justice Party, 27, 28

KALELKAR, KAKA, 40
Kali, 43, 155, 158
Kalyan, 80
Kamaraj, K., 30
Kamma, 5, 27-30, 90
domination, 26
Kamma Rashtra, 27
Kanara South, 32
Kannada, 5, 98, 112, 154
Kanyadan, 46
Kapadia, K. M., 80
Karma, 48, 150, 151, 153, 157
Karnatak, 31, 32, 43, 132
Karve, D. D., 99
Kashmir, 98, 111
Kaveri, 106, 114
Kayasth, 6, 18, 36, 89, 93, 94
Kerala, 5, 15, 22, 31, 34, 78
Keay, J. Seymour, 50
Kere, 80, 117, 118
Kerr, James, 19
Keshava, 148
Kevaladvaita, 158
Kin, 70, 142
Kin group, 13, 70, 110
Kin links, 95
Kinship, 46, 74, 79, 83, 95, 120, 137
loyalties, 95
Kinship system, 144
Kinsman, 114, 128
Kin-ties, 142
Kisan Mazdoor Party, 31
Kishan Garhi, 126
Kolhapur, 22, 25
Maharaja of, 21, 23, 24
Kolis, 5, 131
Krishna, 155, 157
Krishna-Godavari delta, 26
Kshatriya, 7, 10, 51, 52, 57, 61-66, 69, 104, 150, 152
Vanniya Kula, 30
Kunchatiga, 5
Kudiarasu, 24
Kunbis, 24
Kurubas, 69

LABOUR,
division of, 78, 121
manual, 93, 94
mechanisation of, 76
Lakshmi, 158
Lancashire, 79
Language, 13, 33, 111
area, 102
Latthe, A. B., 22
Laukikas, 52
Law, 120
anti-Untouchability, 72
civil, 79
courts, 84
criminal, 79
Gresham's, 147
Parkinson's, 147
Leacock, Seth, 80
Leach, E. R., 6, 7
Left-hand division, 43
Leftist ideal, 30
Leftists, United Front of, 31
Legal fiction, 4, 6, 45
Levy-Bruhl, 137
Liberalisation, 5
modicum of, 97
Lineage, 85
Lineage span, 113
Lineage system, 117
Linga, 156
Lingayat Rajas of Coorg, 62
Lingayats, 2, 5, 7, 10, 32, 33, 43, 62, 66, 90, 132, 150, 154, 156
Linguistic barriers, 105, 108

Linguistic region, 89
Linguistic states, the creation of, 101
Literary tradition, 131
Little communities, 10, 141
Lohari, 38
Lok Sabha, 39
Loyalties, hierarchy of, 13

Macrocosmic problems, 142
Macrocosmic studies, 121
Madhya Bharat, 37
Madhya Pradesh, 2, 37, 107
Madras, 20-23, 25, 27, 30-32
Madhva, 148, 152, 154, 160
Madhvas, 156
Mahabharata, 149
Mahadeva, 155
Mahadevi, 158
Maha Punjab State, demand for, 38
Maha Punjab Samiti Working Committee, 38
Mahar, 5, 24
Maharashtra, 3, 5, 24, 25, 60, 90
Maharashtrians, non-Brahmin, 95
Mahishasura, 72
Maine, Sir Henry, 136, 138
Malaya, 96
Malayalam, 98
Mali, 94
Mallah, 37
Malwa, 59, 108
Mandelbaum, David G., 80
Mandya, 80, 82, 84
Manu, 130, 140
Manusmriti, 129
Manhalli, 80-83
Maratha, 5, 21, 24-27, 41, 90, 100
Marathwada, 24
Marathi, 98
Marriage, 46, 47, 58, 76, 80, 83, 89, 105, 113, 144
  cross-cousin, 58
  uncle-niece, 58
  widow, 46, 50
Marriott, McKim, 55, 126
Massachusetts, 139
Matrix,
  cultural, 123
  social, 123
Mauss, Marcel, 136, 142
Mayer, A. C., 9, 18, 59
McLennon, 138
Melkote, 132
Microcosmic problems, 142
Migrations, 100
Miller, E., 15
Mira, 49
Missionaries,
  as welfare agencies, 107
  European, 19, 62
  foreign, 108
Mitra, 156
Mobility, 4, 56, 101, 103, 131
  caste, 69
  economic, 18
  group, 56, 58
  occupational, 96
  social, 18, 58, 101
  spatial, 59, 96, 101
Mohini-Bhasmasura, 156
Moksha, 48, 151, 153
Monaco, 13
Monogamy, 47
Monasticism, 154
Monasteries, 11, 132, 154
  Brahmin, 106
  Lingayat, 106
Monastery, 132
Monastic organization, 154
Monetization, 82
Monier-Williams, M., 47
Monism,
  extreme, 158
  qualified, 152, 157
  pure, 152
Monolithic unity, 111
Montague, 23
Montague-Chelmsford Reforms, 21, 23
Morasu, 5
Morena, 37
Morgan, Lewis H., 136, 138
Movement, 42
  anti-Brahmin, 28, 86, 93, 105
  Freedom, 100
  non-Brahmin, 20, 22, 23, 25
  Telengana, 28
Movements, sectarian, 152
Mudaliar, 90
Mughals, 133
Mukherji, G., 100
Muller, Max, 50
Multiplex relationships, 73
Muslim traders, 126
Muslims, 4, 13, 20, 34, 88, 103, 133, 150
Munro, Col. Thomas, 50
Mysore, 2, 5, 7, 8, 10, 13, 32, 33, 43, 46, 48, 51-54, 57, 60, 68-72, 74, 80, 81, 84, 89, 90, 98, 100, 105, 110, 115, 124, 126, 132
  Muslim rulers of, 100

Nadar Mahajana Sangham, 41
Nadu Gowda, 112, 114
Nalagonda, 28
Namhalli, 83, 84
Nandanar, 49
Nandi, 155

Narada Sutras, 157
Nanjangud, 41
Narayana Guru, 34
Nataraja, 155
Nationalism, 12
National Development Council, 110
Nayars, 5, 34, 90
NEFA, 12
Nehru J., 13, 53, 71
Nilakantha, 155
Nishada, 64
Niyogi Report, 107
Nizam, 28
Nonaba, 5
Non-Brahmin Movement,
  degeneration of, 23
  growth of, 23
  history of, 20-22
  role of press in, 24
Non-Brahmin Party,
  and elections, 22, 25
  of Bombay, 21
  of Madras, 21
Non-Brahmins, 48, 60, 85, 105

Okkaliga, 5, 7, 32, 33, 68, 69, 71, 72, 90
Oilmen, 94, 114
Orissa, 17, 37, 135

Padayachi, 90
Pakistan, 13, 55
Panagal, Raja of, 24
Panchala, 154
Pancharatra, 157
Panchayat, 84
  caste, 4, 17
  traditional, 17
  village, 84, 90
Panchayat Raj, 5
  in Andhra, 2
  in Rajasthan, 2
Panchayats, 27
  non-official village, 118
  official, 126
  revitalization of, 17
  village, 128
Pant, Pandit, 40
Pantheism, 148
Papa, 48, 151
Parasurama, 155
Parliament and State legislatures, special representation in, 88
Parthians, 154
Participant observation, 136
Partition case, 112
Partition dispute, 113, 116
Parvati, 155, 156, 158
Parvenu caste, 9
Parvenus, 69
Pashupati, 156
Patidar, 5, 90, 95
Patil S. K., 29
Pativrata, 47
Patron and client, 74
Patterson, M. L. P., 22, 24, 25
Paulkasa, 64
Pax Brittanica, 16, 74, 78
Peasant, 68, 69, 71, 85
Peasants' and Workers' Party, 25
Pepsu, 38
Persian, 100, 101
Philosophers, 132
Phule of Poona, 20, 21, 23
Pilgrimage, 77, 105
Pinda, 47
Planning,
  concept of, 14
  democratic, 14, 109
Pocock, D. F., 9
Political parties, 15
  rural, 26
Pollution, 5, 18, 47, 52, 98, 104, 140, 151, 159
Polygyny, 47
Populist radicalism, 2
Potana, 49
Potter, 82, 114, 115
Prachhanna buddka, 159
Prajapati, 156
Prapatti, 157
Primitive, 139
Primitive mentality, 132
Process,
  cultural, 61
  social, 61
Proselytizing, 154
Proselytizing religion, 107, 132, 133
Prostitution, 84
Punya, 69, 151
Punjab, 37, 38
Punjabi, 37
Puranas, 49, 106, 148, 149
Purusha, 150
Purusharthas, 153
Purushasukta, 61, 64, 150

Questionnaire, 122, 142, 145

Race, 33
Radcliffe-Brown, A. R., 136, 138
Rajagopalachari, C., 31
Raj Gonds, 65
Rajanya, 64

Raja of Ramgarh, 36
Rajput, 6, 10, 19, 20, 36, 37, 89, 90
Rama, 47, 68, 155
Ramanuja, 148, 154, 157, 160
Ramanujacharya, 132
Rama Rao, N., 22
Ramaswamy Naicker, E. V., 22, 31
Ramayana, 47, 60, 149, 155
Rameshwaram, 106
Rampura, 57, 68, 69, 72, 80, 84, 85, 90, 110, 112, 116, 118, 124-26, 128, 132, 135
Ranadive, B. T., 28
Ranga, N. G., 29
Rao, D. V., 30
Rarewala, Sardar Gyani Singh, 38
Rau, P. S., 36
Ravi Narayana Reddi, 30
Rayalaseema, 27
Reactionary, 71, 101
Reddi, 5, 27-30, 90
  domination, 26
Reddiseema, 27
Reddy, K. C., 72
Reformers, 123, 132
Region, 13, 98, 110, 111
  natural, 103
Regional development, 13, 110
  balanced, 109
  and backward areas, 14
Regional formula, 38
Regionalism, 13, 14, 33
Religion, 12, 13, 21, 33, 110, 111, 120, 121, 137, 142, 159, 160
  and society, 136
Religions, 49, 108
Religious barriers, 101
Religious life, 148
Religious society, 106
Religious system, 127
Republic of India, 49
Rg-Veda, 63, 64, 153, 156
Right-hand division, 43
Ritual impurity, 51
Ritual purity, 53
Ritual status, 90
Rivalry, Reddi-Kamma, 28
Rivett-Carnac, 79, 80
Robertson-Smith, 136
Rochester, 118
Rome, 136
Rudra, 156
Rudolph, L. I., 2
Rural development, 91
Rural-urban continuum, 95
Ryotwari Settlement, 83

Sacrifice, 124, 126
Sahay, K. B., 36
Salem, 31
Samadarshini, 24
Samsara, 48, 151
Sanjiva Reddi, N., 29
Sanskrit, 100, 132
Sanskritic names, 131
Sanskritic values, 9
Sanskritists, 132, 156
Sanskritization, 8-11, 17, 18, 42-49, 55-57, 59-62, 67, 76, 108, 133, 140, 141, 153, 154
  and acquiring of political power, 56, 57
  in the sphere of kinship, 47
  pre-condition to, 57
  source of fission, 58
Sanyasa, 153
Satara, 25
Satya Shodhak Samaj, 20
Savitar, 156
Scheduled castes, 3, 25, 33, 38, 88
Scheduled castes and tribes, 15, 25, 26, 40, 41, 89
  constitutional safeguards of, 15
  reservation in appointments, 39
  reservation in legislatures, 39
  safeguards for, 87
Scheduled Castes Federation, 30
Scheduled tribes, 3, 33, 88
Schedules, 145
Scots, 111
Script,
  Devanagari, 37
  Gurumukhi, 37, 38
  Roman, 102
Scythians, 154
Sects, 155
  Brahmin, 133
  non-Brahmin, 133
Secularization, 52, 60
  of Hindu life, 54
Secular occupations, 52
Segmentary societies, 117
Self-sufficiency,
  and village, 78
  myth of, 78
Services, traditional, 82
Shah, A. M., 117
Shaivism, 157
Shaivite, 133, 148, 150, 154
  Nayanars, 139
Shaktas, 158
Shakti, 158
Shakti cult, 149, 158
Shandilya, 157
Shankara, 149, 154, 158, 159
Shankaracharya, 154
Shepherds, 69
Shiromani Akali Dal, 38
Shiva, 125, 148, 150, 152, 154-156, 158

Shoshita Sangh, 37
Shraddha, 152
Shrivaishnava, 154, 157
Shroff, R.G., 117
Shudra, 7, 8, 59, 63, 64, 65, 68, 104, 105, 151, 157
Sikh, 37, 88, 103, 150
Sikhism, 160
Singer, Milton, 98, 117
Sinha, A.N., 36
Sinha, S.K., 36
Slavery, 49
  abolition of, 96
Smartha, 152
Smith, 74, 94
Smiths of South India, 43, 45, 67, 69, 154
Social action, unit of, 41
Social base, 30, 75
Social behaviour, 130
Social change, 55, 77, 104
Social disabilities, 87
Social evils, 1
Social injustice, 87
Social implications, 128
Social life, 145
  in the villages, 79
  rural, 133
Social megalamonia, 45
Social mobility, 9
Social order,
  egalitarian, 87
  traditional, 77
Social reality, 131
Social reformer, 9
Social relations, 128
Social sciences, 146
Social structure, 7, 97, 137, 152, 159
Social system, 83, 86, 120
Social work, 143
Social worker, 70, 73, 123
Socio-economic relationships, 77
Sociological research, 89
Sociologist, 6, 7, 65, 66, 88, 111, 114, 116, 118, 123, 132
  French, 142
  Indian, 66
Sociology, 122, 134
  of law and legal institutions, 119
Solidarity,
  horizontal, 74, 75
  vertical, 74
Soma, 42, 153
States Reorganization Commission, 15, 32, 33, 37, 38
Sthala purana, 106
Structural distance, 108
Structural points, 13
Structure, 144
Sub-castes, 4, 48, 89, 105
Subjectivism, 117
Subramanya, 155
Sub-rotation, principle of, 3
Supreme Court, 34
Survey of Rural Credit, 123
Suttee, 49, 79, 149
Swaminarayan, 154
Sweepers, 18

Taboo, 71, 86
Tamil, 98
Tamilians, 100
Tamilnad, 30, 31
Tanjore, 85, 86
Tantrasa, 158
Techniques, 140
  statistical, 144
Technological system, 127
Technology, 11, 109, 126
  Western, 48
Telaga, 29
Telengana, 28-30
Telugu, 98, 154
Terms,
  cultural, 55
  structural, 55
Thakurs, 37
The Amendment Act, 33
The *Hindu*, 31, 38, 41
The League of Non-Brahmin Youth,
  administrative report of, 20, 24
  First provincial conference of, 20, 25
Theological ideal, 48
Theological layer, 60
Thomas, F.W., 99
Thorner, D., 98
Thugee, 149
Thuggery, 49
Thurston E., 43
Thyagaraja, 49
Times of India, 2, 26, 29-31, 35-38, 40, 41
Tiyyans, 34
Toilers' Party, 31
Torres Straits, 136
Travancore-Cochin, 34, 35
Transfer of political power, reaction to, 24
Trent, Scarlett, 80-83, 92
  (Mrs. S. Epstein)
Tribals, 107
Tribal group, 57
Tribe, 120
Tribes, 7
Trichur, 35
Trichy, 31
Tukaram, 49
Tulsidas, 49
Tulu, 5

UNEMPLOYMENT, 84
United Kingdom, 111
United States, 13, 79
Unity,
  horizontal, 98
  of India, 102, 105-107, 111
  vertical, 98
University, 145
Universities, intellectual standards in, 134
Untouchability, 39, 65, 76, 108
  abolition of, 102
  liquidation of 104, 108
  opposition to the abolition of, 105
  the constitutional abolition of, 59, 87
Untouchable caste, 17
Untouchables, 43, 45, 54, 56-59, 63-65 68, 86, 98, 114, 132, 150, 152, 154
  economic position of, 57
Upanayana, 53, 63
Upanishads, 148, 157, 159
Upapuranas, 106
Urban life, 104, 142
Urbanization, 61, 77, 81, 86, 108, 135
Urdu, 112
Uttar Pradesh, 2, 37, 95, 98, 118, 126

VAIDIKAS, 52
Vaishnavism, 157
Vaishnavite, 133, 148
  Alwars, 157
  devotionalism, 157
Vaishya, 10, 18, 57, 61-64, 66, 69, 89, 104, 105, 150
Vaishya, sanskritized, 7
Value-judgements, 123
Values,
  Brahminical, 62
  class, 94
Vamachari, 158
Vanaprastha, 153
Varahavatara, 155
Varna, 7, 8, 57, 61, 63-65, 69, 130, 131, 140, 150
  model, 66, 67
  scheme, 67-69
  Shudra-Harijan, 18
Varuna, 156, 157
Veda, 66, 130, 150, 156
Victor Cousin, 50
Vidarbha, 24
Village,
  community, 83, 120, 123, 126, 127, 133, 152
  general welfare of the, 152
  goddesses, 149
  multi-caste, 135
  study, 121, 141
Villages, intensive study of, 134
Vindhyas, 23, 33, 36
Virashaiva, 32, 156
Virudhanagar, 41
Vishishtadvaita, 152
Vishnu, 148, 150, 155-158
Vishweshwarayya Canal, 81
Vratas, 47, 152

WARANGAL, 28
Wardha Valley, 79, 80
Warner, Lloyd, 139
Washerman, 74, 78, 94, 115, 117
Weddings, 127
Weltenschauung, 77, 109
Western education, 18, 52, 75, 79, 86, 90, 92, 93
Welsh, 111
Western-educated, 12
Westernization, 4, 8, 9, 42, 49-55, 60, 61, 108
Western values, 9
Widow, 131
Widows, child, 54
Witchcraft, Azande, 137
World-view, 125
World War, 83
World War I, 22-25, 84
World War II, 27, 54, 80, 84-86, 104

YALMAN, NUR, 6
Yue-chi, 154

ZAMINDARI, 87
Zamindari system, abolition of the, 37, 102
Zonal Councils, 103

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